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**Sharing experience between Bulgaria and Serbia in economic policy
formulation and development of a strategy for cross-border
cooperation in the EU accession process**

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Background

In nowadays globalising world the significance of the national state is diminished. There is a need for more powerful unions among a greater number of states, and these unions participate adequately and receive their due place in world politics and economics. Under these circumstances the building of borders between neighbouring countries and the promotion of isolation between neighbouring nations turns into a serious hindrance for their adequate development.

Nowadays foreign policy priorities of both Serbia and Bulgaria are similar. One of these goals and priorities is “the united Europe.” The territorial belonging of both countries to the community of Europe needs to be filled with political, economic and social contents. The accomplishment of these objectives in both countries needs the specific participation on behalf of civil society and its organizations.

The EU membership is a natural political priority of both countries, since it provides legitimacy, and transfers them from the group of peripheral, unidentified countries, making them a part of a harmonious political, economic and organizational structure. The EU provides an important external anchor for the policy agenda of neighbouring Balkan countries. The promise of EU membership is a powerful incentive for policy-makers to push through difficult and at times unpopular reforms in their countries. The EU accession process passes through the establishment of a modern governance, stable democracy and sustainable development. One of the advantages of this accession process is readiness of the EU to assist the countries in their efforts by providing them with guidelines, adequate measures and necessary resources.

The individual accession of each country to the EU is related to carrying out of specific necessary reforms and execution of the engagements agreed by the country, and observing the membership requirements. At the same time the cooperation between the countries, the mutual assistance play an important positive role in each country's preparation and accession to the EU.

The act of EU accession for both countries, the similar road to accession, and the similar steps and measures that they have to implement in order to meet the membership requirements, supports the idea for synchronizing the development of both countries and drives them to strengthen and further build mutual cooperation. The differences in the political and socio-economic development of the two countries which have been seen in the recent years due to the different roads and the speed with which each one of them is progressing in the transition from the totalitarian state and centrally planned economy to a democratically governed state and market economy, provide the opportunity to seek equalizing of positions and look for similarities through deepening of the mutual cooperation at different levels and organizations, including cooperation between NGOs, and particularly among those working in support of EU accession processes.

Despite the differences between Bulgaria and Serbia in view of their political and economic developments both countries envision that the European perspective has no alternative. While Bulgaria is close to its full EU membership, Serbia has still to go a way to its future European integration, and to demonstrate the progress in its

accession. According to the assessment of the European Commission though the European agenda and the Stabilization and Association Process are the catalyst for reforms in Serbia, much still remains to be done in view of accelerating the pace of reform and improving the implementation of legislation. Recent conflicts in the region have reduced the links between the two neighbouring countries, which in turn hindered cooperation between them, often accompanied by a lack of trust in institutions, organisations and individuals on the other side of the border. Restoration of confidence is crucial for further trans-border cooperation. "Bulgarian politicians had to understand that the road to Brussels passes via Belgrade, while Serbian politicians had to understand – that the road to Brussels passes through the good neighbourly relations on the Balkans."¹

If at the end of the previous century the topical question for Bulgarian society was "regional cooperation or EU integration," now we have realized that the position is "regional cooperation and EU integration." It is already clear that Bulgaria's EU integration is an irreversible process and there are no fears that it can be postponed or delayed with the engagement in regional cooperation. The requirement from recent years for further development of regional cooperation as a prerequisite for EU integration at that moment seemed like a threat, and a risk for re-directing the efforts to intra-regional forms of cooperation between the not so well developed Balkan economies and diverting our pursuit for EU integration.

With its progress to full EU membership Bulgaria has gradually overcome the mistrust and skepticism concerning bi-lateral and multi-lateral cooperation on the Balkans. The European orientation fosters the development of regional cooperation since the implementation of EU standards and procedures simplifies trans-border cooperation, and promotes mutual undertakings between the civil communities in the two countries (the expert communities, the media, culture-focused organizations, etc.).

After 1999 with the participation of numerous international organizations and donors many new initiatives, ideas, and projects have been developed to foster cooperation on the Balkans. Meanwhile a long path has been walked, experience has been accumulated, results have been achieved with the support and under the pressure of the donors, trans-border cooperation has developed further at level of local authorities, business associations, and civil organizations. The general evaluation up to now is that prerequisites have been created for further development of this cooperation and its transition into a new period. The experience till now shows that trans-border cooperation is a highly useful tool for regional development, especially in underdeveloped border areas or specific policy issues. Regional development in itself is known to be a basis for national economic development.

The initiated institutionalization of trans-border cooperation with the assistance of EU institutions prepares the public for its European future. It allows increase of the awareness of the society and its structures about future perspectives and about the potential of EU programmes and initiatives. The building of euro-regions (the Sofia-Nis-Skopije Triangle, Euro-region Danube 21 – Vidin-Zaicar-Kalafat) with the

¹ Radmila Nakarada, *Jugoslavija I Bugarska na putu ka Evropskoj uniji*; *Jugoslavija I Bugarska dobri Evropski susedi*, Beograd, 2003, p.66

assistance of the Council of Europe and with the participation of the local authorities and the NGOs is a good example of such institutionalization of trans-border cooperation. This cooperation besides building trust between the states aims at exchange of experience and knowledge concerning the governance of similar processes and the accomplishment of common objectives; the application of the expertise of the partners in communicating with the institutions of the EU and the efficient and effective participation in EU programmes.

European orientation and the progress in the bi-lateral relations are a prerequisite for the current analysis and the development of a strategy. Bulgaria started its transition to democracy a little before Serbia and quite soon after that focused on taking its place in many European initiatives and institutions as the Council of Europe, CEFTA, CEI, Partnership for Peace, etc. During the years the country has accumulated extensive experience, which can be used in the Serbian case, for developing its individual road to the EU and the Euro-Atlantic structures. Bulgaria's membership in the Partnership for Peace through the years, its experience as a new NATO member and a future EU member can be beneficial to Serbia, which is attempting to find its own way to these structures.

In the context of Bulgaria's approach of considering bi-lateral relations and regional policy with its engagements related to its NATO and EU membership, the NGO sector seeks contacts and projects, which will activate the NGO sector in Serbia in support of European orientation, and in promotion of the necessary reforms to prepare the country for its EU accession. In the process of establishing and building Serbian institutions the Bulgarian experience and the assistance provided by Bulgarian NGOs for strengthening the standing of these institutions among the public, can be quite useful in the Serbian situation now. The experience of the Bulgarian NGOs accumulated through the past 5-7 years in the area of assisting the process of EU integration in Bulgarian society, deserves to be studied and used by Serbian NGOs, which will have themselves to build public support for integration processes and for central governance in the development and implementation of necessary policies for the realization of forthcoming reforms and the country's preparation for future EU membership. Taking and further developing best practices, Serbian NGOs can contribute to the adequate running of the process of transformation of the economy and society.

The development of integration processes in Serbia will lead to increased importance of NGOs for policy making as a major factor in the shaping of the government policy. The perspectives for future political integration in the frame of the EU poses serious requirements before the potential of NGO sectors in both countries, which development should go ahead the processes in society and should promote the public support for their quick and efficient progress. These organizations are a significant factor in the process of clarification, formulation and carrying out of national policies.

The practice from the last 15 years shows that the non-governmental organizations have to play an important role in the development of market democracies. The question now is how to involve the Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs in the processes of the trans-border cooperation and increase their role and effectiveness in improving trans-border cooperation and further EU integration. NGOs from the two countries have to join efforts to contribute to the economic policy development and

implementation in both countries. They have the sources and mechanisms to create linkages and boost policy dialogue for reinforcing regional cooperation and EU integration. Their cooperation could be an effective instrument for communication of the European idea, for public support for this idea and for helping policy makers implement EU driven reforms.

EU integration of both countries will be facilitated with the developing of closer ties and relations between NGOs, focusing on practical cross-border issues, and the transfer of knowledge and expertise in approaching decision makers and advocating reform development. Bilateral cross-border cooperation should not be overlooked and lost in the larger canvas of European integration and desired acceleration of accession process. Building a consistent cross-border understanding of the common realities and focusing on joint work will add to the quality of accession and will multiply the efficiency of efforts. Besides, the experience of a Bulgarian think tank in working for economic reforms and monitoring accession processes, together with the lessons learnt will be used, within the specifics of the Serbian context, to assist NGOs awareness and involvement as catalysts of these processes in Serbia.

Project Objectives

The project aims to support non-government sector in both countries in assisting economic policy development and EU integration by transferring experience and skills, and building a capacity for cross-border partnerships among NGOs on both sides, thus accelerating cooperation beyond the third sector, in order to promote economic development, and to involve representatives of the other sectors – the public, and the business - in efficient relations, to enhance awareness of EU processes, while developing public dialogue about accession risks and ways to avoid them. In this way the project further develops the capacities for trans-border cooperation between NGOs from Bulgarian and from Serbia.

The project focuses on a topical analysis of the current state of partnership and cooperation, aiming at developing a structured strategy for future cooperation. The project implementation seeks proves that working together, sharing expertise and developing joint decisions is crucially important for the acceleration of the process of EU integration. Such joint projects help governments, business communities and NGO sectors in both countries clarify their vision and expectations about the real steps to be undertaken on the way of economic reforms and restructuring, in order to accomplish the desired integration and EU accession. The project implementation and the strategy proposed by the team will raise regional security and will have a lasting effect by contributing to the sustainability of joint cross-border efforts in order to achieve mutually beneficial goals, and to meet the European agenda on the Balkans.

The Strategy for trans-border cooperation aims to support non-government sector in both countries in assisting economic policy development and EU integration by transferring experience and skills, and building a capacity for cross-border partnerships among NGOs on both sides. This helps accelerate cooperation beyond the third sector, in order to promote economic development, and to involve representatives of the other sectors – the public, and the business - in efficient relations, to enhance awareness of EU processes, while developing public dialogue

about accession risks and ways to avoid them. In this way we tried to further develop the capacities for trans-border cooperation between NGOs from Bulgaria and from Serbia as an effective confidence-building instrument.

Obviously, the European integration has been an important element of the political debate in Serbia though there is still a considerable lack of public awareness of the European integration process. The main perceived benefits of EU rapprochement and future membership are economic development, improvement of living standards and freedom of movement of persons. The Stabilisation and Association process is seen as a process that in the end will result in EU membership of the country. Still, there is a continued need for more information about the actual process, the EU and the European integration both as regards the policy-makers, public administration and the public opinion. In its Third Annual Report on the Stabilisation and Association process the European Commission points out on the fact that “the EU actors in the country need to continue and even increase EU and, more specifically, SAP visibility and understanding.”² The complementary role of the EU actors, including NGOs, needs to be strengthened.

On the 12 July 2005 the European Commission put forward to the Council a mandate for negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). The agreement’s main goal is to promote economic and trade relations, with the perspective of establishing free trade areas and also to regulate the movement of workers, freedom of establishment, supply of services and movement of capital. The aim of the negotiations is to conclude the first comprehensive agreement between the EU and Serbia and Montenegro. This preferential agreement will provide for wide-ranging co-operation to foster the integration of the country into EU programmes and structures. The agreement’s main goal is to promote economic and trade relations, regulate the movement of workers, freedom of establishment, supply of services and movement of capital. It will include a commitment by Serbia and Montenegro to progressive harmonisation of its legislation with that of the EC (notably in key areas of the internal market). It will also provide a basis for co-operation in other fields.³

Three months earlier (April 12, 2005) the European Commission approved a Feasibility Report assessing the readiness of Serbia and Montenegro to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. The Feasibility Study concluded that Serbia and Montenegro is sufficiently prepared to negotiate an SAA. The Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn said: "This is the beginning of the European road for Serbia and Montenegro. The country has achieved a great deal over the past few years, and it is time to move on.”⁴

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement is the final stage of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), creating a contractual relationship between a country and the European Union. The conclusion of such an agreement represents the country’s commitment to complete over a transition period a formal association with the EU. Such an association has a high political value. It is based on the gradual

² Serbia and Montenegro: Stabilisation and Association Report 2004, p.48-49

³ http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/news/2005/ip05_915.htm

⁴ http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/news/2005/ip05_421.htm

implementation of a free trade area and reforms designed to achieve the adoption of EU standards with the aim of moving closer to the EU.⁵

In March 2004 the Commission proposed a European Partnership (as one of the means to intensify the Stabilisation and Association process) indicating the main priority areas for the preparation of Serbia for further integration into the EU.⁶ It was assumed that the Partnership would help the country with its reforms and preparation for future membership as it identifies priorities for action in order to support efforts for moving closer to the EU within a coherent framework. The country was encouraged to develop a plan for the implementation of the European Partnership priorities, with a timetable, to speed up its European integration process. One of the short-term priorities explicitly put down in the proposal for Council Decision is “create an environment, conducive for the development of NGO and civil society organisations”. They are expected to be important actors in realising some of the other reforms: electoral law reform, public administration reform, judicial reform, and fight against corruption.

Although Stabilisation and Association Agreement is intended to have the purpose of achieving the sort of formal association with the EU it is far from the road map and guarantee the European Agreement for association gives. The destination is the full realisation of association after a transitional period through implementation of the same core obligations but there is no concrete horizon for achieving this purpose. The Agreement is designed to encourage Serbia to adopt real reforms towards full realisation of the association but it is not giving the country the status of potential candidate. The country's prospects of accession are in full dependence with the further assessment by the EU of the effective implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

Transition to fully functioning democracy and market economy and closer relationship with the EU need proper functioning of democratic institutions in Serbia and building administrative capacity and ability to implement legislation and reforms. Fight against corruption, which continue to hamper reforms and economic development is crucial for the association with the EU. Improvement of country's business climate and industrial competitiveness, attraction of more foreign direct investments and increase of foreign trade, acceleration of bilateral and multilateral regional cooperation to achieve better economic development is fully dependent of the pace of reforms. Final success of the reforms will depend on the cooperation and coordination of activities among all actors (national and international) in the process of reforming Serbian society and economy. NGOs are to be main actors in this process of reforming society.

In its first annual report on SAP the Commission pointed out the main outstanding challenges of “building effective, democratic state”. Among other manifestations of the democratic state civil society, and especially NGOs, are crucial in making government and civil service both transparent and accountable to the citizens. In this context joint projects and bilateral cooperation helps Serbian NGOs develop as more

⁵ http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/actions/sap.htm

⁶ Proposal of the Commission of the European Communities for a Council Decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with Serbia and Montenegro
http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/rep3/part_s-m.pdf

active and important factor in the process of building democratic state and strong civil society. At the same time, these joint projects correspond to another challenge – the challenge of enhancing regional cooperation. “Integration with the EU is only possible if future members can demonstrate that they are willing and able to interact with their neighbours as EU Member States do.”⁷ NGOs have to play a significant role in ensuring the SAP because they are better understood by the society while explaining the process and communicating its achievements more effectively.

It is now important for Serbia to focus on the concrete steps to be taken to move towards meeting all pointed challenges. The need of civil society participation in reforms implementation makes NGOs important participants in implementing reforms and meeting requirements considered necessary to reach the final goal of full EU membership. The EU nature, its policies and its institutions for policy implementation need to be better explained to all sections of the society. Much of the future gains are invisible for the population while painful reforms are experienced by all. And here is the role of the NGOs to explain the necessity of the compulsory reforms and the final effects of these reforms. A more effective communication of the long-term benefits of the SAP and the EU integration to the public could be a decisive factor in mobilising support for the necessary political and economic reforms.

NGOs have an important role to play in improving public knowledge and understanding of the SAP, the European integration and the European Union itself. Most of the joint projects developed between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs focused on communication activities at national and local levels dealing with issues important for the accession of Serbia to the European standards and bringing the country closer to the EU.

Though relatively limited in scope, SAA has to play a crucial role in helping Serbia build a stable, legitimate state, able to adopt, implement and enforce the *aquis* (EU laws and rules). NGOs themselves have a significant role to play in the process of implementation of the rules of the *aquis* by actively supporting administrative capacity building. Serbian institutions and Serbian society should develop the capacity of a member state and Serbian NGOs definitely have a role to play in this process. Bulgaria itself has an experience to share in this context. This initial stage of capacity building is just a compulsory prerequisite for developing real accession process. Bulgaria has gone through it and could offer ready solutions. Serbia is a sovereign country, it has its own specific features and it will follow its own road to EU, but still it has the chance to learn from others’ mistakes and good practices and thus develop its own model of growing as a member state.

As the democratic future of Serbia is key to the progress in the region it needs to receive soon an invitation to Partnership for Peace and be offered a European Agreement, as well. Together with Bulgaria and Romania’s accession to the EU and the expected start of the negotiations with Croatia the issue of Western Balkan states’ status is coming on the agenda. Although the EU is going through tough times and its policy and institutions need urgent reforms, the European perspective of Balkan countries should be guaranteed and its implementation should go on in parallel with the reforms in the Union. What NGOs can do in this situation is to draw an objective

⁷ http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/com02_343.pdf

and detached picture of the impact of EU accession process on social, economic and political development in Bulgaria and Serbia.

The history of the EU enlargement till now has proved that the aspiration to be part of United Europe is powerful stimulus and a very important lever for democratic and economic reforms towards market economy. The practice so far indicates that the prospect of EU membership is crucial in consolidating societies in accession countries and this is a fact in all of them, not only in Bulgaria. It is logical to expect the same impact in Serbia, too.

Bulgaria is a good example of the fact that the main motivator for reforms (incl. establishment of a dependable rule of law, democratic and stable institutions and a free economy) is the relationship with the EU based on a credible prospect of membership once the relevant conditions have been met. Bulgaria's experience proves that the EU enlargement acts as a powerful positive force towards fundamental reforms. The perspective of starting negotiations on the elaboration of SAA between Serbia and the European Commission promotes EU-backed reforms in Serbia. The perspective of EU accession and its expected benefits serve to calm down painful economic (and sometimes political) reforms. Political and social stability in Serbia and hence – in the Balkans, is crucial for EU prosperity and long-term stability.

The situation with the enlargement of the EU is rather complex at this point but obviously the EU is aware of its responsibility and the decisive role it has to play in the region's future development. Serbia needs a clear strategy and a roadmap to EU integration in order to force the society towards transforming and preparing for EU membership. At present, Serbia is not ready for accession (and membership) but EU should find proper mechanism to help it, to boost social activity in right direction. It is a hard time for EU to try to absorb new countries that are not functioning the way EU expects but it is not possible to leave them outside the Union any longer. So, the European Commission should find the way for making Serbia (and the region of the Western Balkans, as a whole) part of the EU. Significant changes are needed both in Serbia and in EU policy to clearly bring the country into the EU. NGOs could help in elaborating policy steps to be undertaken and establishing the needed sequence of actions both in Serbia and EU (including EU members), as well as proposing mechanisms to make them work. Sharing Bulgarian experience will be quite helpful in this process of elaborating and undertaking of concrete measures to boost integration.

The framework of the EU policy for the region is enriched with elements drawn from the recent successful enlargement process. In this direction, the European Partnership, drawn up for each Western Balkan country, including Serbia, will identify, on a regular basis, priorities and obligations to be fulfilled. EU financial assistance will be directed to the priorities set out in the partnerships. The country itself has to draw up a national action plan for implementation of the partnerships, which will provide a clear agenda against which to measure progress. Bulgaria has a sound experience to be shared with Serbia in this area. The two countries could be partners for reform, exchanging experience and building on success.

But without the active involvement of all the three sectors (authorities, business and civic society) the all-inclusive trans-border cooperation, peace and stability in the region cannot be achieved, nor the increased region development. The involvement of NGOs in EU accession process strongly depends on the development of the third sector in each of the countries and highlighting EU membership as a priority of national policy. Donors' participation and donors' funds (and their availability) is crucial to this development, too.

EU accession initiatives launched by the Bulgarian NGOs generally face a friendly attitude on the part of the state and the Bulgarian society. The experience gathered and the achieved results in the process of Bulgarian accession to the EU are assessed as very positive both by the state and the society and this gives Bulgarian NGOs confidence that they could successfully share experience with neighbour states' NGOs.

There are more than 2000 NGOs in Serbia and some of them are working in fruitful cooperation with the democratic government. A sound prove for this strong commitment to cooperation is the new Memorandum of cooperation between the State office for EU accession in Serbia and 30 Serbian NGOs signed on 12 July 2005. This Memorandum is the first document signed between a state office and the non-government sector. And it became a real fact at the moment the European Commission approved the framework for starting negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro for signing Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Signing of this Memorandum is a clear sign of the role NGOs in Serbia will have to play in the process of preparing the society for the accession to EU. The document will help to achieve higher coordination of EU accession activities.

Last but not least, the project aims at assisting the further development and strengthening of Serbian NGOs, and turning them into institutionally more mature organizations, with capabilities, which will provide for their sustainable presence in the Serbian society and will enable them to play a specific role in the EU accession processes. Although not the primary goal, this is a very essential objective in the current project, since most joint project partners on the Bulgarian side have expressed their individual experience and observations that point to expertise on the Serbian side, which needs mobilization, to turn it from individual, or scattered, into a clearer focused and better NGO institutionalised and characterised. This is especially needed in the accession period of Serbian society with all the ongoing and forthcoming processes and reforms – in order to make sure that the Serbian NGO sector lives up to the expectations of society, develops further in advance and thus keeps its driving and directive momentum, to avoid the possible lagging behind the development of social processes in the EU acceding phase. Besides, the differences between the development of the Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs and in the economic environments will be considered as opportunities and not as threats for the development of both countries and their NGO sectors.

Research Methodology

1) Selection of method - survey

In order to analyze the current state of NGO cooperation between Bulgaria and Serbia the project team decided that the best methodology for collection of information is through a survey of identified organizations in both countries. The survey questionnaire was developed in a way to provide collection of information about diverse projects from diverse NGOs working in diverse areas. The objective of the survey is to provide the necessary information for the analysis and the conclusions, which will be the basis on which the cooperation strategy will be developed.

2) Identification of organizations to be surveyed

The Center for Economic Development in Bulgaria and the Economic Institute in Serbia first agreed to study independently all major NGOs in each country in order to find out those who had implemented joint projects between Bulgaria and Serbia. This was carried out through phone interviews and/accessing the organizations' official websites. Thus preliminary information was collected about potential organizations and their corresponding partners from the other country. Preliminary information was screened in order to select organizations and to identify only projects carried out in the past five-year period (2000-2004/5). This restriction was necessary in order to focus on projects, environment and organizations factors, which can be adequately analyzed in relation to the current state of the NGO sectors in both countries. This picture of projects in various areas of implementation will provide the current grounds on which the strategy will step, to meet the requirements placed by the EU accession context. The information was filled in a structured table, and exchanged between the two partners – CED and EI in Serbia, and each partner enriched and completed its list of identified organizations and projects to be surveyed with the information provided by the other side. Thus a final list of organizations has been identified, which were to be contacted further, and surveyed for the purpose of the analysis.

3) Instruments through which information was collected, based on the developed survey questionnaire

The information was collected from the identified NGOs through *filling out in written form the questionnaire* and/through *face-to-face interviews*. Organizations were reached by phone, and informed about the specific information expected from them and asked to fill out the survey sample, and then they were sent the developed questionnaire by e-mail. Some of the bigger organizations were visited and interviews were carried out with team members of the corresponding projects, which gave a richer picture to the information of the survey questions. Other organizations provided the answers to the questions in written form.

4) Methodology for development of survey questionnaire

The survey was developed based on desk research of the information on projects available from step 2) and from the expert assessment of the essential topics and areas

which will enable profound analysis of the current state of cooperation, bearing in mind the EU accession process and goal, and the usefulness of this information for the development of the cooperation strategy. After individual expert research and analysis, experts exchanged opinion in a brainstorming session, then the ideas were exchanged between partners, and the contents and the specific questions in the survey questionnaire were agreed upon. **The contents of the questionnaire were developed to include questions focused at the purpose for the information application** – to use it for the analysis of the current information and furthermore – to develop a structured strategy for NGO cooperation between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs with a perspective on the EU integration of both countries. For this purpose the team members decided to include questions that provided more than numbers and official information about specific projects, particularly value put on individual (self and partner) assessment and assessment of the long-term effect from the project for the corresponding country/organization.

Survey of Joint Projects

The project team collected information about the record of joint activities and work so far between NGOs from Serbia and from Bulgaria for the period of the past 5 years (2000 – 2004), and analysed the real state of cooperation and partnership. Stepping on the analysis of the current state of partnership and cooperation CED and the Economics Institute summarized the data, carried out a needs assessment of what activities, and action will best correspond to Serbia's EU integration context and current situation, and developed a strategy for its facilitation. This needs assessment is a sound background for future participation in cross-border projects and it means jointly defining main issues of mutual interest and ways of addressing these issues.

The analysis proved out that working together, sharing expertise and developing joint decisions is crucially important for the vision and expectations of governments, business communities and NGO sectors in both countries about the real steps to be undertaken on the way of economic reforms and restructuring to accelerate the process of EU integration.

The survey shows that the NGOs in both countries are still in a process of defining their areas of interest and most of them are oriented towards a wide range of survey fields (EU accession including). With the development of the process it is obvious that more NGOs will meet European integration issues. Their involvement in the process will be due to their specific featuring, flexibility and great ability to raise public awareness and help policy makers and especially, to draw public attention to EU membership.

The importance of NGOs in the process of EU integration is based on their striving to bridge the gap between citizens and policy-makers. They have a significant role in social development in both countries by generating ideas, making analyses and proposals in all social areas and making efforts to contribute to the policy development and implementation. A major aspect of their work is their determination to raise public awareness and inform citizens about their research results and possibility to influence decision-making and to implement those results in reality. One of the major goals of think tanks is their work along these lines – not analyses for

analysis sake but transforming analyses into effective decisions and policies. Think tanks are in place to correct governmental policies through their independent professional opinions, comments and suggestions.

The forums, conferences and workshops organized by think tanks on different issues provide the opportunities for shaping the government policy in various fields – cross-border cooperation, perspectives of bilateral relations, anti-corruption policies and actions, regional cooperation and integration, financial sector restructuring, legal reform, network-building in the media and cultural area, public discussions in the field of economy, with diversity of options for decisions. The development of these joint projects and the discussions supporting them bring together different viewpoints, quite often contradicting - people argue, and in the process – the best solutions are found.

In numerous situations, before making an important decision policy makers need the objective analysis of a given issue and the exploration of different possibilities. They themselves quite often possess a limited potential and time for the purpose. Think tanks come to the rescue, with their valuable assistance of qualified experts and effective proposals for decisions. Think tanks themselves are active observers and analysers and they strive to exert strong impact on government economic policies. They not only propose ideas but also develop regulating documents, thus creating the legal basis for development in different social spheres.

General information about surveyed NGOs

The selected Bulgarian NGOs are sustainable, well-established organizations with diverse expertise, related to the country's preparation to the EU accession. They represent a wide array of organizations – political institutes, economic analytical centers, media development NGOs, etc.

For the purpose of this analysis the NGOs included in the survey are classified by feature and basic area of expertise. In general they can be classified as working in the following major areas:

a) Political/democratic transition

This subgroup includes such policy institutes, whose basic efforts focus on political transition and reforms, and the establishment of the values and characteristics of democratic society. These include: *The Center for Liberal Strategies (CLS)*, *The Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD)*, *The European Institute (EI)*

1. Center for Liberal Strategies (CLS)

CLS (www.cls-sofia.org) is an independent, non-profit think-tank. It was registered with the Court in 1994. Its six full-time researchers combine academic background with direct involvement in the political process, civil sphere activity, and governmental institutions.

CLS's **guiding idea** is that in the present East-Central European context the organizational form of the think-tank is a powerful instrument for promoting the

public debate, exercising influence on the decision-making process, resolving various social and political crises. **CLS areas of expertise** are politics and polity, political risk assessment, political parties; foreign and integration policy; constitutional policy and state institutions; election campaigns, electoral attitudes, electoral process; sociological surveys and analysis; media and politics; macroeconomic analysis, economic history; institutional economics, and fiscal policy.

CLS develops and implements projects addressing various aspects of the social, economic and political situation in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. It organizes workshops, conferences, and seminars with local and foreign experts, politicians and public figures.

2. Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD)

The Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD, www.csd.bg), which was founded in late 1989, is an interdisciplinary public policy institute dedicated to the values of democracy and market economy. CSD is an independent organization fostering the reform process in Bulgaria through impact on policy and civil society. **CSD objectives** are to provide an enhanced institutional and policy capacity for a successful European integration process; to promote institutional reform and the practical implementation of democratic values in legal and economic practice; to monitor public attitudes and serve as a watchdog of the institutional reform process in the country; to strengthen the institutional and management capacity of NGOs in Bulgaria, and reform the legal framework for their operation. CSD achieves its objectives through policy research, process monitoring, drafting of legislation, dissemination and advocacy activities, building partnerships, local and international networks.

CSD **major programmes** include: Law Program, Economic Program, Vitosha Research/Sociological Program, European Program, Coalition 2000 - Public-private Partnership to Counter Corruption.

3. The European Institute

The **mission** of the European Institute is to support the efforts of governmental and non-governmental agencies to successfully prepare Bulgaria for EU membership through research, technical assistance, raising public awareness and training.

EU works in the following major areas: EU enlargement and accession; strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in the accession process; contribution to stimulating public debate about EU enlargement and informing stakeholders about the costs and benefits of accession.

b) Civil society building

This subgroup focuses on the establishment and building of a civil society environment – free access to information and independence of the media, and the right of citizens to be informed and to participate in the reform processes in society.

Foundation Media Development Center

The Media Development Center, Sofia (MDC <http://www.mediacenterbg.org>) was established in 1998 to promote the activities of independent media in Bulgaria and to foster capacity building of the media by encouraging good practice in journalism, ethics, networking and cross-border cooperation. MDC provides professional training for journalists and media managers from South Eastern Europe, training courses for operational and language skills, media handbooks and manuals publishing, information service on media and for the media. The Center is a member of the South East European Network for Professionalisation of the Media (SEENPM), set up in 1999, with participants - 17 media centers and institutes from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia and Yugoslavia. MDC **technical capacities** include: training facility for hands-on broadcast and print media production - digital radio studio integrated with state-of-art class room with workstations equipped with software for radio production, post production and broadcasting (Dalet, CuBase, WaveLab, Raduga); software for newspaper layout and design; fast Internet accessibility; also available professional multifunctional digital TV cameras, image editing software and video editing suites; state-of-art equipped multifunctional training/conference rooms for workshops, conferences and other public events. MDC offers foreign expertise and leading professional experience on publishing, distribution, marketing and advertisement in print media. It also organizes various courses on investigative journalism, elections reporting, European integration, minorities' issues and legal aspects of journalism.

c) Economic and regional development

This subgroup includes organizations, whose major focus is the establishment and development of a market economy, the achievement of a sustainable economic growth and competitiveness of Bulgaria's economy within the regional, European and global development context. This subgroup includes the *Center for Economic Development (CED)*, the *Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS)*, the *Economic Policy Institute (EPI)*, and the *Institute for Market Economics (IME)*.

1. Center for Economic Development (CED)

The Center for Economic Development (CED – www.ced.bg) is a non-governmental think tank in the economic policy area, established in 1997, successor to the Economic Group at the New Bulgarian University, active since 1996. CED **goals** are to contribute actively to Bulgaria's economic development and achievement of sustainable growth, to play a key role in formulating economic policy options and in promoting public debate on major economic issues, to foster cooperation between the public, private, NGO sector, and educational institutions in addressing and resolving economic problems. CED achieves its goals and objectives through its **basic activities**: it carries out economic research, analysis and elaboration of current economic legislation; develops economic policy options, advocates for proper implementation of policies and promotes the exchange of ideas and information among experts community; increases public awareness through the dissemination of findings; organizes workshops, conferences, and other public events. CED efforts are proactively focused at shaping Bulgaria's economic policy, at assisting economic reforms and establishing a functioning market economy in the country, by working in

the **priority areas**: Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy and Economic Growth; High Tech Development; Small and Medium Size Enterprises; Infrastructure: Energy, Telecommunications, Transport; Privatization and Restructuring of the Economy; Corporate Governance; Social Policy. Pension Reform; Financial System; Taxation and Fiscal Policy; EU Accession and Regional Cooperation; Foreign Economic Relations; Economic Statistics.

2. Institute for Market Economics (ime)

IME (www.ime-bg.org) is one of the leading independent economic policy think tanks in Bulgaria. Its mission is to elaborate and advocate market-based solutions to challenges that citizens of Bulgaria and the region face in reforms. This mission has been pursued since 1993 when the Institute was formally registered. IME **objectives** are to provide independent assessment and analysis of the government's economic policies; to be a focal point for an exchange of views on market economics and relevant policy issues. IME **priority areas** are: European Union Accession and Integration; Pension, Healthcare and Education Reform; Administrative and Regulatory Reforms, Efficiency and Private Provision of Public Services; Internet Provision of Economic Knowledge via EASI; Reforms in the Balkans and Beyond; Competitiveness; Improving Environmental Quality Through Markets. IME **priorities for 2004 – 2005** are: the monitoring of economic policies; cost benefit analysis of regulations; free movement of capital, goods and people; advocacy for lower and flatter taxes (income, corporate and social welfare contributions); shadow and informal economy; public education in market economics and economic liberty; market reforms in the financial sector.

3. Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS)

IRIS (www.iris-bg.org) is an independent, non-profit think tank, dedicated to developing regional strategies for democratic policy making in South Eastern Europe and increasing international understanding of emerging Balkan issues. The Institute initiates, develops and implements civic strategies for democratic politics on national, regional and international level, promotes the values of democracy, civil society, freedom and respect of law. IRIS represents a strategic combination of advocacy-oriented and education-oriented think tank. The **mission** of IRIS is to establish a link between academic and policy-making and to stimulate democratic development by generating policy analyses and recommendations for regional cooperation, security, interethnic relations, conflict management and resolution, economics and foreign policy. IRIS has established successful partnerships with policy institutes throughout the region. The key **activities** undertaken by the IRIS are focused on fostering dialogue and cooperation by conducting international conferences and roundtables. IRIS works closely with international organizations, the National Assembly of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the University of Sofia.

IRIS **research areas** are: Regional and international policy of Bulgaria; Conflict prevention and management; Interethnic and inter-communal problems in South-eastern Europe; Development of security- systems in South-eastern Europe; Regional

economic and infrastructure development; Bulgaria's integration into EU and NATO; regional civic cooperation.

4. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI)

The Economic Policy Institute (<http://www.epi-bg.org>) is a non-governmental non-profit organization, founded in 1997. **Its mission** is to encourage and support the implementation of free market experience and know-how that will influence Bulgaria's effective participation in the global economy and its membership in Euro-Atlantic structures. EPI's **main activities** are: advocacy work - advising Government and Parliament bodies; analysis of alternative approaches to economic policies; recommendations of policy changes aimed at encouraging economic growth; training of politicians, policy-makers, corporate managers and private entrepreneurs; research projects on economic issues. EPI's **primary tasks** are to bring experts together to explore issues and exchange views in order to generate innovative proposals for practical economic policy measures; to provoke public discussions on economic issues; to provide independent expert opinions and analyses.

Review of Surveyed Projects

The research areas in which of surveyed NGOs work are rather broad and sometimes not directly connected to the European integration. Yet, all projects presented by the surveyed organizations are focused on civil, democratic, and sector development, awareness increase, involvement and support of policy-making, and improvement of interaction between the three main sectors participating in the political, economic and social life of society – the government, civil society and business society. Issues discussed and analyzed through project implementation, held seminars, conferences, workshops and roundtable meetings have not only assisted in raising public awareness, but have prepared the society for more active participation in the policy-making process through public-private dialogue and strengthening of cooperation between the NGOs and the representatives of government/local governments. Undoubtedly, these characteristics and assistance to reforms are a part of Bulgaria's preparedness of for the European accession.

Surveyed Projects Divided in Groups

The purpose of this survey was to provide information about joint Bulgarian-Serbian projects carried out by the corresponding Bulgarian organizations in the period of the past five years (2000-2004). The collected information resulting from the survey findings was to be used as the basis for the development of the strategy for bi-lateral cooperation. Although the projects in question do not fall into strictly classifiable priority areas, still they combine their specific aim with civil society development and NGO strengthening. For the purpose of drawing the best benefit from the collected information, these projects were divided and classified into three subgroups by area:

Group 1 – projects to encourage democracy building, working in the political area, fostering the transition from a totalitarian to pluralist society, for establishing

democratic values and practices in general; assisting the primary functioning of pluralism, human rights, etc.

Group 2 – projects related to civil society building and strengthening, promoting organizations and institutions, crucial for civil society functioning, such as access to information, free media, etc.

Group 3 – projects aiming at economic or regional development and cooperation, at solving specific economic problems, involving representatives from various sectors and groups – civil, academia, business, private, governmental, experts – to participate in reforms, and decision and policy-making in the country/ies.

The **surveyed projects** are **described** according to the data collected in the survey (title, goals, activities, results, partners, donors, etc.)

Group 1 projects – democracy building and political development:

1. Informing the Bulgarian Public on Political Events in Yugoslavia (implemented by CLS and its Serbian partners funded by USIS, Sofia)

The *aim* of this project was to supply the Bulgarian public with first-hand *information on the development of political events in Yugoslavia from the perspective of the Yugoslav opposition*. This was undertaken after analysis showed that the Bulgarian mainstream media were being informed on Yugoslavia either by the Milosevic regime or by the international media, and both sources were found to be inadequate, albeit in different respects. It consisted of a *series of visits by Yugoslav opposition leaders*, political scientists and election monitors - Dragoljub Micunovic, Chair of the Democratic Centre, member of Dos, Prof. Vladimir Goati, political scientist from CeSID (an NGO monitoring the elections in Yugoslavia), Milan Nolic, political analyst from the NGO Center for the Study of Alternatives, Ivan Vejvoda, political scientists and Executive director of OSF-Belgrade, and Zoran Lucic, director of CeSID. The format varied: a public lecture plus discussion (Micunovic), presentation/discussion with Bulgarian political scientists and journalists (Vejvoda), and two press conferences.

2. Conference Yugoslavia: “Peaceful Transition at a bearable social cost” (funded by Freedom House, Budapest, implemented by CLS in 2000)

The *goal* of the conference was to *provide a public space in the Balkans for a discussion of transition in Yugoslavia in the context of the positive experience in peaceful transition in Bulgaria and Macedonia*. At the *conference* (in Skopje) that goal was definitely achieved. Media coverage was also envisaged. Media coverage was better than expected in Bulgaria and Macedonia and worse than expected in Serbia. *Ways of furthering of the debate in Serbia have been subsequently discussed between the Bulgarian and Serbian co-organizers, as well as with other possible Serbian partners. The project has been a first step in Balkan co-operation for the solution of a major regional political problem.*

3. Bulgarian-Yugoslav Task Force (Funded by OSI East-East Program, implemented by CLS in the period July 2001 - September 2003)

The goal of the project was to organize and carry out a series of workshops between Bulgarians with special "transition" experience and relevant groups in Yugoslavia. These workshops covered various topics:

1. "Ex-communist lawyers functioning in a democratic system"
2. "Students for change"
3. "Transition in the Army"
4. "Political expertise in times of change"
5. "NGOs in times of change"

In the framework of the project CLS organized a visit of a Serbian delegation of NGO leaders and opinion makers to Bulgaria and met them with journalists and Bulgarian NGOs. A Bulgarian delegation visited Belgrade to discuss some of the topics. Two conferences summarized the common work and products (in Sofia and in Belgrade). A paper was prepared, printed and translated in Bulgarian and Serbian.

4. Coalition Building and Monitoring for Anti-Corruption in Southeast Europe, part of the Southeast European Legal Development Initiative (SELDI – www.seldi.net, funded by USAID, implemented by CSD)

The goal was to introduce a region-wide institutional framework for public-private cooperation in countering corruption in the countries of Southeast Europe.

The scope of work (objectives, tasks, activities) included: Diagnostics and assessment including the development of a background document analyzing the regional corruption issues and a pilot round of regional corruption monitoring in the seven SEE countries. A second round of the monitoring and a regional corruption assessment report was developed analyzing the origins of cross border corruption in the region. *The topics of research* were: Anti-corruption in seven Southeast European countries. A Regional Corruption Assessment Report was developed: Anti-Corruption in Southeast Europe: First Steps and Policies (<http://www.seldi.net/rcar.htm>).

5. Sharing the specific experience of Bulgaria as a country in SEE, bordering Serbia, on European integration, both association and accession processes (implemented by European Institute and partner Institute of European Studies, Belgrade)

6. Support for promotion of reciprocal understanding between the European Union and Western Balkan countries (implemented by EI and its partner Belgrade Centre for European Integration)

Group 2 projects

1. Agenda for Civil Society in South - East Europe "The Blue Bird" (funded by German Marshal Fund, USA, Dutch Government, Bank of Sweden; Volkswagen Foundation, implemented in the period October 2000 - October 2003, CLS).

The project was implemented by CEU Budapest, the New Europe College in Bucharest, Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin

The goal was to come up with a policy document, which should serve as the vision paper for development of the region in the next 20 years, addressing both governments and publics offering coherent policy strategies. Findings were integrated in a common product, resulting from the work of four research groups, each

consisting of six scholars from the region, each focusing on a specific theme, groups - composed of scholars from different fields of knowledge. Topics covered:

1. How the Politics of Social Inclusion is Possible in Southeastern Europe?

Analysing the uneasy process of "socialization" in the region, the risks for social cohesion, social and political groups driving the social agenda, gender, ethnic, and youth problems; access to education and the characteristics of the social agenda in the region; the role of NGOs and universities; the social effects of "accelerated" or delayed EU integration. (Research Coordinator - Dr. Mihail Arandarenko, Serbia)

2. How the Regional Economies can be Integrated in the Global Economy?

Economic consequences of establishing a regional market and of introducing the Euro currency; comparative advantages and disadvantages of the region; the institutional environment; factors for foreign investments; expected strategies of resistance to globalisation; the role of the national states in blocking or promoting competitive strategies.

3. What is the Future of the Nation States in SEE?

Internal dynamics of state-formation in the region; sustainability of existing states and statellites; existing constitutional regimes and their effect on the economy and society; risks of the weak states; prospect of introducing regional institutions and effects of EU enlargement on the functioning of the national states in the region; prospects for ethnically "clean" or multi-ethnic states. (Research Coordinators - Dr. Ivan Vejvoda, OSI Belgrade and Dr. Zarko Puhovski, Zagreb University).

4. Is SEE Identity Possible?

Re-thinking history of the region - diversity and common base - using anthropological, sociological, historical and hermeneutic methods with focus on everyday culture, intellectual and political debates, education, cultural, military and economic histories. Reconstruction of the controversial interaction of various identity patterns (local, national, regional, confessional, occidental, oriental, global, etc.) and will try to answer a crucial question for the future of the region: is the SEE identity possible.

2. Debate on Regulatory Reforms in Serbia (implemented by IME in 2001-2002, funded by OSI, Sofia)

The **goal** was to create practices for preliminary regulation impact analysis in Serbia, which will enable decision-makers to choose between existing alternatives on the basis of more ample data, and will assist the public to participate and influence on this choice of regulations. The project analyzed in details regulatory procedures. Based on practical experience provided it reflected realistically and attracted civil group representatives to the initiative in assessing the impact and the combination of different political elements in the area of economy, democratic rules and human rights. Project **results** are summarized in "A Concept for the participation of the private sector and NGOs in regulation creation." A group was created named "Civil council for policy" to the Serbian center for Liberal-democratic Research, to assist the further efforts and to expand public and civil participation.

3. Documentaries on Southeast Europe "Balkan Network" (2002) and "Parallel World" (2003, implemented by CMD and partner TV producer house "Virus,"

Belgrade). During the shooting of the documentary the Center for Media Development communicated with institutions and organizations to present their viewpoint on the topics. For the documentary “Balkan Network” CMD cooperated with the Customs Agency, and for the shooting of Parallel World – with Ministry of the Interior, The Muslim District Organization in Kurdjali, International Minority and Cultural Center, Open Society Club-Kurdjali.

Scope of Work): In October 2002 CMD consulted its Serbian partner on shooting a film on trans-border crime in Southeast Europe – “Balkan Network,” and in October 2003 the two partners cooperated in the creation of a film on ethnic and religious tolerance – “Parallel World.”

Topics of Research: The topic of “Balkan Network” was the trans-border criminal networks in Southeast Europe and how to prevent them. The second film looks at the conflicts in the region, resulting from the ethnic and religious intolerance trying to show that the opposite is possible – tolerance and interethnic understanding.

Methodology: Maximum viewpoints and visions were sought during the shooting of both films, interviews were taken from governmental, NGO, religious representatives, citizens. Field interviews were made in Sofia, Kalotina and Kurdjali.

Achieved Results (and deliverable/s): CMD has copies of the films with subtitles in Bulgarian and a copyright to broadcast them on Bulgarian TV. They were broadcast in Stara Zagora, Haskovo, Kurdjali and Smolyan – specific in ethnic and religious demography regions.

Benefiting Groups: Bulgarian TV audience, who learnt about the interpretation of these problems in different national milieus – Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, Macedonia, Bosnian and Croat.

4. South East European Network for Professionalization of the Media – SEENPM – www.seenpm.org (implemented by CMD and partners Media Center Belgrade, Media Center Nis, Novi Sad School of Journalism, Association of Independent Broadcasters ANEM, Yugoslavia)

Scope of Work: The **objectives** of the Network are to contribute to the improvement of professional standards of media professionals and the democratisation of the news media in the region; to boost the exchange of information and journalistic expertise among media professionals in the countries of the region; to promote mutual understanding among member-countries; to strengthen member-organizations and further develop their capacity; to improve mutual knowledge and establish cooperation links among the members.

The main areas of the SEENPM activities are: training of journalists, public relations officers, and trainers; documentation, research and media monitoring; translation and publication of books, newsletters, etc; study trips and exchange of media professionals; exchange of trainers, curricula, course materials, and media products.

All activities are available at the SEENPM website: www.seenpm.org. Calendar of on-going and forthcoming activities is also regularly posted at the website.

Topics of Research are: Media Ownership, Reporting Diversity, Media Landscape of SEE, Media Training Needs Assessment, Training Impact Indicators, BG – Serbia: Access to Information, Ethics and Media Business, and Ethics and Journalism.

Results: Regional comparative publications – training needs assessment methodology (book **Media Training Needs Assessment** at www.seenpm.org – publications), training impact indicators (book **Impact Indicators - Making a Difference** at www.seenpm.org), manuals (book **Reporting Diversity** at www.seenpm.org), regional studies and data (book **Media Landscape of South East Europe** at

www.seenpm.org), expert comments (book **Bulgaria – Serbia: Access to Information** at www.seenpm.org).

Benefiting Groups: Media community in SEE and in the individual countries, journalists, trainers, journalism professors, experts, decision-makers, students in journalism and anybody interested in the media development in SEE.

Group 3 projects:

1. Civil Strategy for Developing of Bilateral Relations between Bulgaria and Serbia (funded by OSI – Sofia, implemented in 2003 by IRIS, Sofia and Forum for Civil Rights – Nis)

The main project goal was to work out a civil strategy for development of the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Serbia that would identify those basic interests, social groups, communities and institutions that have the capacity to serve as a basis for the further development of the bilateral relations.

Scope of Work (objectives, tasks, activities): Project activities follow specific design of sequence and implementation in the following four dimensions: organization activities, analytic activities and generation of recommendations, public activities, communication of project's findings

Topics of Research: The three types of activities – organizational, analytical, and public, were structured in five major test models, reflecting the main dimensions of the bilateral relations – central level; local level; economic cooperation; culture, education and media; civic cooperation.

Achieved Results (and deliverable/s): Project findings, analyses and recommendations were published as a book in Bulgarian, Serbian and English language (See “Assessing the Perspectives of Bulgarian-Serbian Relations”, Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia, 2003).

Benefiting Groups by the Project Results: Direct beneficiaries of the project were experts from research institutes, civic activists, intellectuals, journalists, business executives, Members of Parliament, and representatives of the central executive and local authorities.

2. Cross-border Cooperation at Local Level between Bulgaria and Serbia: Sharing good practices between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs and local governments from the trans-border area (funded by Freedom House, implemented by IRIS, Sofia and Forum for Civil Rights – Nis)

Project Goals: The main goal of the project is to promote and strengthen good neighbourly relations between cross-border communities by sharing experience and good governance practices and laying the grounds for future cooperation in the field of democracy strengthening and civic participation.

Participants in the project had the opportunity to meet at two training sessions and a policy workshop to receive training and discuss issues of. The project provided for exchanging good practices of civic participation and training for effective mobilization for promoting democracy.

Scope of Work (objectives, tasks, activities): Setting up a free forum of exchange of information, knowledge and skills in developing good governance and transparency on local level; Providing training in cooperation between organized civil society and the decision making for sustainable local development; Establishing networks for

cooperation between local civil society organizations and between municipalities from both sides of the border.

Topics of Research: Decentralization and local government; Strategic planning for local development; Civic participation and involvement in the process of decision making; Cross-border cooperation opportunities

Achieved Results: Training Sessions for participants from both Serbia and Bulgaria. Training session agenda addressed issues of common interest between civil society and local government and application of strategies for reconciliation of diverse policy priorities on local level and also sharing experiences of Bulgarian civic organizations.

Policy Workshop for Bulgarian and Serbian representatives of local governments. Participants exchanged information and policy techniques for addressing pressing local issues effectively in a tense regional and national environment without fuelling conflicts with national governments.

Project findings, a training session *manual and a policy paper* were compiled and published as a book in Bulgarian, Serbian and English language (See *Cross-border Cooperation at Local Level between Bulgaria and Serbia*, Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia, 2003).

Benefiting Groups by the Project Results: The target audience consisted of representatives of the municipal authorities in Bulgarian-Serbian border region (mayors, deputy-mayors, counsellors, and experts), as well as local NGO activists dealing with local self-governance issues.

3. Task Force on the Financial Sector Restructuring in South Eastern Europe (funded by Freedom House/USAID under the Regional Networking Project, implemented by EPI, and partner: Economic Institute, Belgrade)

The goal of the project was to establish a multilateral network of experts (a Task Force) to study and provide recommendations on financial services sectors in the region in order to promote effective governmental reform agendas. I aimed to provide the banking community in Bulgaria and Serbia with insights successful restructuring; facilitate the networking and communication opportunities between banking communities in Bulgaria and other South-East European countries; to contribute to the strengthening of the civil society and public engagement in the transformation processes in the region; to assist Bulgarian and Serbian financial services sector experts by providing independent information and analysis and support the decision making process; to reveal the main pitfalls and dangers of the restructuring process in the SEE and propose possible ways of evading them; to review the driving forces of change that are impacting both the global and regional financial services sectors and transfer expertise and best practices to the region.

The Project Activities included:

1. A workshop – represented a meeting between experts from Bulgaria and Serbia during which were discussed specific problems, faced by the Bulgarian and Serbian financial sectors.
2. Country Studies - The participants in the workshop discussed and identified the most important issues of interest to studying the financial services sectors' restructuring processes in Bulgaria and Serbia.
3. Meetings in Belgrade and Sofia - Three meetings (one in Sofia and two in Belgrade) took place. The meetings brought together representatives of the Bulgarian and Serbian banking communities and regulatory and supervision bodies, in order to facilitate the practical exchange of experience and best solutions.

4. A Conference in Belgrade – in the conference participated representatives of private and state banks, government banking regulation and supervisory bodies and NGOs working on financial services sectors reforms in both countries.

Project Products: Publication of country studies (on Bulgaria and Serbia) produced by Bulgarian and Serbian experts; Final Report with main conclusions; Policy recommendations to Bulgarian and Serbian governments and respective regulatory bodies; Publications in the mass media in the two countries.

Achieved Results (and deliverable/s): promoting the development of effective reform agendas in financial services sectors; creating better legal environment for reducing barriers to effective financing of firms; assessing benefits and costs of financial regulation in public interest terms; improving banking supervision in Serbia (by creating an early warning system; developing productive instruments for combating money laundering etc.); providing a forum for financial sector players and regulators to build a bridge between strategy formulation and implementation by financial services institutions.

4. Development of Social Policies to Accompany Privatization (implemented by CED and Serbian partner European Movement in Serbia, January 2002 - May 2003, funded by Freedom House, Budapest)

A major Bulgarian partner in the implementation of the project was the Balkan Institute for Labour and Social Policy in Sofia.

The project **aimed** at developing social policies through social dialogue among the government, the unions, employers, and investors, and thus assisting the process of privatisation in Serbia, and to advise on social programs that need to accompany privatization.

Scope of Work: The project partners studied the social policies that accompanied privatisation in Bulgaria, and analysed the process of social dialogue. The study and analysis were based on a specially designed and implemented sociological survey among the major participants in the process of privatisation in Bulgaria. The survey was the result of in-depth interviews and group discussions with the main stakeholders in the process of privatization to cover the philosophy, the implementation and the conclusions based on the resulting outcomes from the privatization. Views, conclusions of the study, and recommendations were presented before the participants in *The Social Policy Forum in Belgrade, Serbia* (28 October 2002) – representatives of the Serbian government, the trade unions, economic experts, academia, and donors. The keynote speakers focused their presentations on the current situation in Serbia and shared their experience and observation from the Bulgarian privatization.

Project Results and Deliverables: Based on the collected information, the team developed a comparative *Report on Privatisation, Social Policy and Social Dialogue*, which presents the Bulgarian experience, compares it to the privatisation processes in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, draws conclusions and lessons, which are used as the basis for designing recommendations and an Action Plan for the Serbian side. The project deliverable was the publication *Towards Stability and Prosperity. Social Dialogue in Serbia and Bulgaria: Comparative Experiences of Two Southeast-European Countries*, in Serbo-Croat and in English. It was distributed among participants and partners in Serbia, and among main stakeholders in the process.

Benefiting groups: all stakeholders participating and affected by the social reform and restructuring process in Serbia: developers and creators of social bills, trade and professional unions, research institutes in the economic and sociological areas.

Achieved goals: The indirect aim of the project - to strengthen and assist NGOs in their institutional building was accomplished.

Joint Projects Assessment – Bulgarian Point of View

The general assessment of the completed projects is that in Bulgaria and Serbia there already exist expert communities in the areas of political and economic research, culture and the media, which communities have established bilateral relations and are ready to carry out or continue their cooperation. All these organizations can be quite useful for the structuring of public dialogue in Serbia in relation to its EU perspective for accession.

There is a great degree of similarity and compatibility in the organization of work of the Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs, while their joint work and experience provides opportunity to build further their expertise and strengthen the organizations institutionally. The similar projects enable the collection of adequate and realistic, reliable information about the existing and continuing processes and social attitudes in the other country, which assists the formation of a correct understanding of these processes and attitudes. The joint work also provides for identification of suitable potential partners for further development of the cooperation, as well as the identification of individual experienced experts for future projects and work in particular areas. Once been established, the contacts with such a suitable partner the possibility to continue the joint work with this partner, enabling not only the creation of a single product but to continue building and developing based on this product; to use the already identified approach and access to public administration and governmental agencies and institutions at various and different levels for continuous communications and further improvement of interaction and cooperation. This is particularly important bearing in mind the fact that part of the Serbian NGOs are not genuine NGOs by nature, although in their work they try to act like such. The established sustainable policy institutes, with which Bulgarian NGOs would be willing to work, are still not quite numerous. The self esteem of the Bulgarian NGOs, which have undergone rapid development during the past 4-5 години, quite stable, with established reputation due to their successful work with the donors and useful; cooperation with the governmental administration, which have proven their role and significance for the policy making process, sometimes gets in the way of their efforts to establish contacts with Serbian NGOs which are new to them, and to start working with them at full speed. An existing hindrance is the still sometimes difficult communication between the Serbian government and the NGO sector, which in itself leads to a weak presence of this sector in the policy making process. But it is important to mention that during the past 4 years, presence of NGO sector in the policy making process is strengthening. The fact that some important studies, law drafts and strategies, including the National Strategy for EU Accession, are written by NGO sector is a good illustration of this finding.

The interrelations between the NGOs from the two countries are not clearly structured and are not based on well-organized and sustainable cooperation. Due to the lack of tradition in their relations sometimes they are solving similar problems without looking for the experience and cooperation of other similar organizations from the

other country. A logical reason for this may be (among others) the weak interaction at the central level – the insufficient cooperation between the two countries in carrying out their basic priorities, which partially overlap (e.g. the EU accession process). At the central level there are numerous initiatives undertaken within the Stability Pact, The Council of Europe, etc., which are in themselves a good basis for promotion of cooperation between the communities (local governments, NGOs, professional unions, civil movements, associations, etc.).

A characteristic feature of the cooperation between the two countries is the need to look for a balance in the development of good-neighborly bilateral relations, the establishment of each one of the two countries as an important subject for the development of the regional policy and the observing of the undertaken responsibilities and obligations of Bulgaria to NATO and the EU. The potential of the future cooperation between NGOs from the two countries should be based on the already implemented projects, their problematic areas, and topical issues. The advantages of the implemented joint projects are related to the exchange of information and methodology, exchange of experts and professionals, penetration of various good practices between the countries, better understanding of the regional situation and better understanding of the societies in both countries, more objective reporting of the “neighbour” by the media.

The experience gathered by the implemented joint projects proves that the effective trans-border cooperation needs the creation of NGO connecting networks built on the bases of already gathered information and data-basis. That is why our aim is to develop a strategy and propose an action plan for facilitating networking, establishing new contacts and helping mutual understanding.

1) Project titles

Project titles of surveyed joint projects are showing a great variety of issues jointly researched and discussed. Some of them are directly connected to the process of EU integration of both countries; others deal with the development of bilateral relations and trans-border cooperation at local level. A number of joint projects are devoted to political events and political stability on the Balkans. A couple of projects examine media activities in both countries and contribute to the improvement of professional standards of media professionals. There are projects studying a definite sector development and restructuring in both countries or examining specific issues like corruption or regulation impact assessment. As a whole they all are important for successful reforming of Bulgaria and Serbia and have their impact on the preparedness of the countries for EU accession.

2) Goals

Most projects aim at solving a specific task, and objective – analysis of the situation in a certain area, finding a solution to a problem, creating a mechanism for action, development and production of a certain deliverable. All projects have achieved an even more important goal – the establishment of close contacts on bilateral and multilateral basis with NGOs in the region, exchange of information, experience and good practices in the work, mutual assistance to the striving of NGOs to establish themselves as an important sector in the socio-political life of the countries. An even more important goal achieved by the projects is the cooperation of NGOs with the

governmental administration and their positioning as a substantial actor in policy-making.

According to the assessment of Bulgarian partner organizations in all cases project results were in compliance with the initially set goals and objectives. It is of great significance to preliminarily discuss project goals among the partners and to plan well the context and the potential risks before the project implementation. Selection of the project partners and discussion of the project idea and joint project preparation are considered the most significant steps in the project implementation. Preliminary meetings and clear division of tasks and responsibilities are important, too.

3) Activities

Among the stock of activities, used by the participants and partners in all joint projects are: holding seminars, training sessions, conferences, workshops and roundtable meetings; public information and dissemination campaigns; direct expert meetings on local and central level; sharing information and contacts; publication activities, and other actions in the context of the general purpose of the joint projects. All these activities have proven their efficiency in the process of the project implementation and achievement of goals, and can be used in the implementation of future projects too. The direct communication between the experts in the period of project implementation and the organization and carrying out of specific events, the exchange of information and their mutual acquaintance with the other side eliminates possible accumulated mistrust from previous year and times, deals with rivalry and creates a solid basis for future productive work.

Some of the projects mark their beginning with training sessions, involving participants from both Serbian and Bulgarian NGOs. Training session agenda addresses issues of common interest and creates conditions for sharing experiences between Bulgarian and Serbian civic organizations. Training sessions provide opportunities for elaborating adequate strategies for meeting interests of civil society and governments (including local governments) for reconciliation of diverse policy priorities. Conducting policy workshops for Bulgarian and Serbian representatives of central and local governments provides participants with the opportunity to exchange information and policy techniques for addressing pressing local issues effectively.

4) Results

As a result of these joint projects focused on research and analysis of different problems and in-depth studies in various areas a couple of publications were done. By publishing the complete analyses of a broad variety of issues both quantitative and qualitative results were presented and delivered. Usually, round table discussions are organized when finishing the main study. So, project findings, analyses and recommendations together with discussed issues are published as a book in Bulgarian, Serbian or English language. Special manuals are prepared for training sessions needs.

Discussions are an important mechanism for transferring knowledge. Usually, partners involved in each project, discuss the context of the relevant project when it is drafted. Also, they discuss the political and economic environment when meeting thus transferring information about the other neighbouring country. Discussions and meetings helped to identify similarities and differences in the economic and political processes in the two countries and to find areas where some of the countries is ahead

of the other and can be used as an example in the process of reform building. And this is the mere reason to go on with the preparation and implementation of joint bilateral projects and cultural events, and establishing bilateral contacts on all levels (NGO, business, local communities, individuals).

Some of the deliverables include such fundamental studies as the Regional Corruption Assessment Report: Anti-Corruption in Southeast Europe: First Steps and Policies, introducing an objective and detached picture of the impact of corruption upon social, economic and political developments in each country⁸. Others represent created by them documentaries about Southeastern Europe “Balkan Network” (2002) and “Parallel World” (2003), copies of which are available and broadcast in regions with specific ethnic and religious demographic diversity.

As a whole the results from joint projects are pointed at promoting the development of effective reform agendas in different sectors; creating better public environment for reducing barriers to effective bilateral cooperation; assessing benefits and costs of reforms implementation; developing productive instruments for combating corruption; developing regional comparative publications.

The analysis of the results of implemented projects shows that common work and exchanged experience is received with great public interest and attention by the NGOs in either countries. Through the joint projects new contacts and relations are established and developed, information about the countries collected and disseminated, about their socio-economic development, about partners, problems and needs for future partnerships in specific areas, experience is shared in the area of public-private partnership, which is new for both countries, and new possibilities are outlined for work of the NGOs.

As main topics of joint interest, where cooperation between NGOs in Bulgaria and Serbia could lead to synergies and mutual benefits, could be pointed out: European integration; anti-corruption; reform of judiciary; public- private partnerships; media development; fundraising and NGO management; joint training initiatives, events and initiatives aimed to improve the level of knowing and understanding each other; etc.

5) Partners

In most cases the partners have been selected based on previously implemented joint projects or upon recommendation of the donors. Sustainable partners are sought, and contacted, with which communication is relatively easy. Due to the lack of clear organization of some Serbian NGOs and the insufficient trust in their sustainability, quite often personal contacts are sought with prominent and well-known in Bulgaria experts, which proves to be more reliable, and the experts are involved directly in their individual capacity or through the organizations in which they work. Most NGOs put a stress on the significance of these established contacts, which not only assist the implementation of joint projects but also bring quality predictable expertise to the projects. Many of these experts have already been through preliminary training in project participation, which training turns to be very useful for the successful project implementation.

⁸ Anti-Corruption in Southeast Europe: First Steps and Policies; Southeast European Legal Development Initiative, www.seldi.net

The representatives of the Bulgarian NGOs realize that it is difficult for the NGO sector in Serbia to work in the complicated political environment in the country, from the point of view of “protection of national interests.” Differently from Bulgarian NGOs most of which have gained the public respect and good reputation in the past 5 years, it seems as if the Serbian NGOs have weakened their civil influence in this period. The NGO community is to a great extent amorphous, its actions are circumstance and power-dependent, while the NGOs themselves are not self-sustainable, do not rely on a strong civil society and in many cases do not work actively for its building, development, and strengthening, but mostly – for their own interests.

Different organizational development of the partner organizations and different experience can also be a problem. Sometimes different problems in both countries in the same sphere, due to the different context, which require different approaches, make it difficult to work on joint projects. This on its part makes cooperation on certain issues senseless or impossible, which means that not all types of projects are suitable for regional approach. Different understanding of the problems and approaches for solution also may lead to misunderstanding to the common approach in regional projects. Often before starting the project the organizations did not have previous experience in conducting joint initiatives. If that is the case, they might need more time to adapt to each other’s specific work-styles, which could be difficult if the project has a shorter duration (for example, 1 year).

Partner organizations that have been working on joint projects assess former cooperation as satisfactory and they are ready to work on future joint projects with the same or other NGO from the neighbouring country, because they have already established good working relationship and they know each other. Considering that known partner organizations are more or less at the same capacity level, have similar approach and work-styles, competence and professionalism allowing them equal partnership and that most of them have already elaborated strict rules and procedures on partnerships for joint project, as well as a mechanism of solving disputes, conflict of interests and problems, they believe that working on joint projects in the future could be fruitful and beneficial to both countries’ organizations.

6) Donors

There is no great diversity of donors, which support the bi-lateral cooperation between the countries on the Balkans. The greatest interest to this cooperation in the region comes from American donors, with a considerable part of the funding provided by USAID. Open Society Institute is the major donor supporting joint projects. The EU has a special program - CARDS, the work under which is not quite active. The projects up to this moment under this program are mainly to create databases of experts and partners, which would enable in the presence of sustainable funding to work from now on more efficiently on future projects.

In general donors are very much devoted to promoting cross-border cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe, and support such initiatives through various programs. All of them have their own vision how this cross-border cooperation should be developed, and in some cases this vision does not fully match local needs and the vision of local key stakeholders. They endeavour to choose project goals in

accordance with the society's agenda in both countries and each project is usually thoroughly discussed among the project partners and with the donors before developed and approved. General conclusion of NGOs working on joint projects is that donor programs provide favourable framework for such projects and benefit joint initiatives. As a result, they have important impact on facilitating networking and cooperation in the region.

EU accession process is high on the agenda of donors and they are very much inclined to support projects assisting policy making on the road to EU accession. They show readiness to support valuable initiatives to prepare certain countries, organizations or areas of activities to the EU accession.

Assessing the impact of the projects so far from the viewpoint of outlining the profile of the region and its needs for future assistance and cooperation, the donors express intentions to continue to work on a bi-lateral and multi-lateral basis, redirecting their attention from Central to Southeastern Europe. Part of the projects give recommendations and identify priority areas for future work, which makes it possible to build further, stepping on these projects, and attracting the attention of the donor community.

7) Benefiting Groups by the Project Results

Direct beneficiaries of the joint projects are experts from research institutes, civic activists, intellectuals, journalists, business executives, Members of Parliament, and representatives of the central executive and local authorities. The target audience of the cross-border cooperation projects consisted of representatives of the municipal authorities in Bulgarian-Serbian border region (mayors, deputy-mayors, counsellors, and experts), as well as local NGO activists dealing with local self-governance issues. The projects in the area of media development were beneficial to Bulgarian TV stations and their vast audiences, which were acquainted with the problems and interpretation in various national environments - Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, Macedonia, Bosnian and Croat. Here we can add Media community in SEE and in the individual countries, journalists, trainers, journalism professors, experts, decision-makers, students in journalism and anybody interested in the media development in SEE.

The greatest beneficiaries by the projects results are civil sectors of both countries and their non-government organizations that learn to work together. Some of the projects envisage sharing of experience and technical assistance to the Serbian partner in organization strengthening supporting the development of civil society.

Joint Projects Assessment – Serbian Point of View

1) Description of Methodology

The research on mutual cooperation between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs started with the gathering of data on the hitherto joint projects, by applying the so-called case study. It involved the gathering of the appropriate data on the relevant projects from the NGOs, which had worked on joint projects in the more recent past.

These data contain the basic information on the project; project objectives and end results; description of mutual cooperation and transfer of knowledge, as well as the role of donors' organizations.

The data were gathered by surveying those NGOs, which, as we were informed, had participated in joint projects. The list of these NGOs, including other relevant data, is provided in the enclosed table. Eight such NGOs were identified and eight questionnaires were collected. The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire in the written form, which was sent to these NGOs and - after receiving their answers - additional explanations and data were obtained by contacting their representatives directly. From the form and content of the enclosed questionnaire it can be seen that it was anticipated to gather the basic data on the project after which it was attempted to obtain the quantitative and qualitative data for further analysis on the basis of open and closed questions.

2) Results of the Survey

The results of the survey were analyzed at two basic levels, i.e. by means of case study and synthetic analysis. As for the case study, the answers to the questions from each questionnaire were summarized and the information of relevance for the formulation of a strategy was presented. In the synthetic analysis the evaluations of the respondents – made in answering the closed questions – are presented in the form of graphs, while the qualitative part of this analysis provides the basic conclusions systematized on the basis of qualitative information.

Case Study

Economics Institute

a) *Basic information* - The project entitled «Restructuring of the Financial Sector in Southeast Europe» was realized in cooperation between the Economics Institute from Belgrade and the Institute for Economic Policy from Sofia. The project was carried out in the period June – August and the final report was presented in September (Sofia) and October (Belgrade) 2003.

b) *Project description* - The project objective was to identify the similarities and differences in the processes of transition of the financial sector in Serbia and Bulgaria and exchange knowledge and experience in this area. The project was prepared under the auspices of the Regional Project Network, sponsored by Freedom House and financed by the USAID. It was concluded that the end results attained the project objectives in full. The major advantage of joint regional projects lies in the fact that local research institutions have a direct access to the source of information, which is of utmost significance for the quality of every analysis. The gathering of information in the field had the greatest influence on the successful attainment of the project objectives. On the basis of successful hitherto cooperation, joint research can be continued towards research on the development level of individual segments of the financial market.

c) *Cooperation* - Mutual communication and coordination of joint work was evaluated as very good, which also refers to the expert potential of the NGO partner in Bulgaria. It is pointed to the need for a more effective promotion of projects within future cooperation. It is desirable to hold round tables and consultative meetings, as well as to publish a bulletin and the like. Cooperation among NGOs from the countries in the region can be strengthened by establishing a network for the exchange of information between the well-positioned organizations that would specialize in some area on this occasion, in addition to their basic activity.

d) *Transfer of knowledge* - Mutual knowledge of the facts about the economic and political situation in each other's country was evaluated as «minimal», which means that there is the basic knowledge of the facts. There are great similarities in the economic and political processes, but little attention is devoted to the experiences of the countries in the region in view of the fact that both countries apply the tactics of taking much more advanced countries as their model. The areas of research being of interest for cooperation in the next five years will include all areas, which require harmonization with the EU standards, as well as the projects that will point to the possibility of cooperation between the two economies.

e) *Donors' role* - The topic of the project was formulated in such a way that it meets the requirements of the two countries' economic policy, while the projects objectives were selected entirely in accordance with their social priorities. The research on the process of EU accession is accorded the highest priority by the donors, but they have a partial vision as to the development of a strategy for regional cooperation.

Institute for European Studies

a) *Basic information* - In cooperation with the Economics Institute from Sofia, the Institute for European Studies from Belgrade realized the project entitled «How to Use Bulgarian Experience with European Integration in Serbia» in the period February – July 2002. The donor of the project was the Open Society Institute from Budapest.

b) *Project description* - As the project title clearly shows, the project objective was to get acquainted with Bulgarian experience with EU accession, as well as the use of that experience in Serbia. Within the realization of the project – in addition to the preparation of the relevant study – two seminars were held (one in Belgrade and the other in Sofia) for the employed in the government administration, experts and students. The end results were very successful seminars with good attendance, especially the one in Sofia, whose major event was a visit to all institutions concerned with EU accession; useful papers of the Bulgarian colleagues, with the summary of the results of Bulgarian EU integration, as well as the joint proposals for the application of their experiences. The end results attained the project objectives in full. The visit to the Bulgarian institutions specializing in European integration had the greatest impact on the successful attainment of the project objectives. There is interest for further cooperation in this area and a specific topic was launched within the project – the role of the judiciary in European integration – which was almost unknown in Serbia until then.

c) *Cooperation* - Mutual communication and coordination of joint work was evaluated as very good and the expert potential of the NGO partner as good.

d) *Transfer of knowledge* - The knowledge of the facts about the economic and political situation in Serbia was evaluated by the Bulgarian NGOs as very good and the knowledge of the situation in Bulgaria by our NGOs as insufficient. It was concluded that – apart from the former Yugoslav republics – Bulgaria is most similar to Serbia in a cultural, economic and political sense. The interesting areas of research for cooperation in the next five years will be Euro-Atlantic integration; intensification of bilateral, economic, political, security and cultural cooperation; joint struggle against cross-border crime and terrorism; transport, energy and communication corridors, as the lever of mutual cooperation, and national minorities as the bridges of cooperation.

e) *Donors' role* - The research on the process of EU accession is at the highest priority level among the donors, but they have a partial vision of the development of a strategy for regional cooperation.

Belgrade Center for European Integration⁹

a) *Basic information* - The implementation of the joint project of the Belgrade Center for European Integration and the European Institute from Sofia, entitled «Support to the Mutual Understanding of the Relations and Dialogue Between the EU and Western Balkans», started in January 2004. It is expected that the project will be completed in December 2005.

b) *Project description* - The project objective is to facilitate the integration of the West Balkan countries into the EU by using the experiences of the earlier and current candidates for EU membership, especially Bulgaria. The major activities within the project are: the preparation of the authors' studies devoted to the topics of relevance for the integration of the West Balkan countries into the EU; exchange of information at the joint expert meetings and via special web site. To be more specific, the subject of research covered the following areas: legal and political analyses of the situation, as well as the (hitherto and future) reforms in the mentioned areas. The end results are as follows: five studies devoted to these topics were completed in 2004, another two studies will be completed in the course of 2005; the book containing these studies will be published at the end of 2005. The potential users of the results of this research are: the government administration, especially the ministries in charge of those issues, as well as the legislative bodies of Serbia and Serbia & Montenegro. It was concluded that the end results attained the project objectives in full. However, it was stated that the weakness of joint projects lies in the fact that the specifics of a country are often neglected, although they are often of utmost importance for the success of the proposed reforms.

⁹ The commentaries relating to cooperation, transfer of knowledge and donors' role are the same as those of the Institute for European Studies.

Southeast XXI – Center for Euro-Balkan Cooperation¹

a) *Basic information* - The joint project of the Center for Euro-Balkan Cooperation from Belgrade and the Center for Liberal Strategies from Sofia, entitled «Yugoslavia and Bulgaria: Good European Neighbours», was realized in the period December 2001 – December 2003. The donor was the Open Society Fund, within the «East - East» Program.

b) *Project Description* - The project objective was to promote bilateral cooperation between Bulgaria and Serbia. The major activities within the project were the writing and publishing of a collection of papers and the chronology of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations, as well as the holding of a conference in Sofia (in March 2002, with 20 participants from Belgrade). The basic research methodology included economic, policy and media analyses for the papers in the above-mentioned collection of papers, and historic research for the chronology. Among other things, the end results of the project were also two published books on the mentioned topics. The potential users of the results of this research are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, students, journalists, etc. The future joint work on the projects is of utmost significance, because bilateral cooperation has been neglected and is much below the possibilities and needs of the two countries.

Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development

a) *Basic information* - The project entitled «Code of Best SME Finance Practices in South Eastern Europe» was realized in 2001 by the Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development from Podgorica and the Center for Economic Development from Sofia. The donors were the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and Open Society Institute, within the East – East Program.

b) *Project description* - The project objectives were to highlight the most effective SME finance policies and programs in Southeast Europe, and to inform both private and public sector institutions about the impact of these policies and practices; to formulate and implement innovative SME finance policies and vehicle in the region; to identify the mechanisms for overcoming the common SME finance obstacles in the region and to encourage SME development. The most important activity within the project was the gathering of the data on the SME sector in each country included in the project. The basic research methodology was an analysis of the secondary data and case study. On the basis of the case studies prepared for each country, recommendations were made for the joint solving of the problem of SME sector financing at the regional level. The potential users of the results of this research are the organizations concerned with SME sector development ranging from national agencies, Governments and competent ministries to international organizations specializing in private sector development, as well as business associations.

The end results attained the project objectives in full. It is pointed to the non-existence of efficient monitoring and failure to implement the recommendations made as a weakness. The activities of utmost significance for the attainment of the project objectives were the gathering and presentation of the data for each individual country, in the form of case studies, a joint meeting at which the findings of this research study

were presented and the publishing of the brochure presenting the end results and basic recommendations of this research at the national and regional levels. The joint projects enable the exchange of experiences, thus preventing the possible errors and ensuring an adequate implementation of the best solutions within the national framework. Cooperation between NGOs strengthens the relations among countries still further, which is one of the most essential elements of EU accession.

c) *Cooperation* - Cooperation was professional. Mutual communication and coordination of joint work was evaluated as excellent and the expert potential of the NGO partner as exceptional. Understanding the common objective and values ensures the successful implementation of joint projects.

d) *Transfer of knowledge* - The knowledge of the facts about the economic and political situation in Serbia by Bulgarian NGOs, as well as the familiarization with the situation in Bulgaria by our NGOs was evaluated as insufficient. It was also pointed to great similarities in the economic and political processes in Serbia and Bulgaria. Bulgaria is ahead of Serbia as regards some phases of transition, so that it is interesting to hear its experience and lessons learnt on the path to EU accession. The interesting areas for cooperation in the next 5 years will be: direct foreign investment, business legislation, especially in the banking sector, including leasing, and standardization (business and technical).

e) *Donors' role* - Research on the process of EU accession is at the medium priority level among the donors, who have a partial vision of the development of a strategy for regional cooperation. It was stated that the rules for participation in the donors' program often imposed restraints on the work on projects.

Education Center

a) *Basic information* - The Education Center from Leskovac carried out the joint project in cooperation with the municipality of Silistra, NGO Black Sea–Adriatic from Sofia and the ABC Silistra Company. The project, entitled «Top Management», was realized in the period September 2003 – March 2004. The donor was the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

b) *Project description* - The project objectives are the improvement of the quality of top management in Southern Serbia through education in management skills and modern management trends in the world; adoption of basic knowledge and skills in modern economic areas, while at the same time laying emphasis on teamwork (use, advantages, team creation, etc.); improvement of the efficiency of businesses and performance of regional business leaders; affirmation of the partnership between the three sectors and possibility of cross-border transfer of knowledge. The major activities within the project are: a two-day weekend seminar for a target group of participants from the Jablanica and Pčinja districts devoted to the following topics: human management, basics of finance for managers, strategic management, operative planning and budgeting, and business plan.

The end results attained the project objectives in part. They included the acquisition of new knowledge on the part of businessmen in the field of modern management, as

well as talks about economic cooperation and the establishment of contacts during the business trip of businessmen and municipal officials from Leskovac to the Silistra region. The respondents mentioned the poor interest of businessmen in seminars as a weakness.

c) *Cooperation* - Cooperation was carried out without any problem, because both parties understood the significance of the project at the very beginning. The preparedness of both parties contributed to the operational development of joint actions to a maximum, coupled with the attainment of the project objectives to a maximum as well. Mutual communication and coordination of joint work was evaluated as excellent, and the expert potential of the NGO partner as good.

d) *Transfer of knowledge* - Knowledge of the facts about the economic and political situation in each other's country was evaluated as very good.

e) *Donors' role* - Research on the process of EU accession is at the medium priority level among the donors, who have a partial vision as to the development of a strategy for regional cooperation. It was stated that the rules for participation in the donors' programs are improving rather than restraining the work on projects.

Forum for Civil Rights

a) *Basic information* - The project entitled «Democratization and Local Development of the Bulgarian - Serbian Relations» was carried out in cooperation between the Forum for Civil Rights from Niš and the Institute for Regional and International Studies from Sofia. The project was carried out for a year and was completed at the end of 2002. The donor was Freedom House from Belgrade.

b) *Project description* - The project objective was the launching of an initiative for the development of civil strategy for the promotion of bilateral relations. The areas of research were: bilateral economic partnership, reciprocal actions at the central level, cooperation in the fields of culture, education and media and cross - border cooperation. It was concluded that the end results attained the project objectives in part. Joint international conferences had the greatest impact on the attainment of the project objectives. The major advantages of joint projects are the exchange of experiences between the partners and the possibility of launching a joint initiative. A weakness lies in the lesser possibility of their sustainability.

c) *Cooperation* - Mutual communication and coordination of joint work was evaluated as very good, and the expert potential of the NGO partner as exceptional. Emphasis is laid on responsibility, readiness for teamwork and the existence of an expert team in the partner organization.

d) *Transfer of knowledge* - The knowledge of the facts about each other's economic and political situation was evaluated as good. In view of the fact that both countries are in the process of transition, the implementation of joint projects contributes to the transfer of knowledge and exchange of experiences. Thus, they are of mutual benefit for speeding up the transition of the two countries' economies and the fastest possible accession to the European Union. The promotion and advancement of human and civil

rights, as well as the values of civil society will be the interesting areas of research in the coming period.

e) *Donors' role* - Research on the process of EU accession is at the highest priority level among the donors. However, the donors have a partial vision as to the development of a strategy for regional cooperation.

Center for Regionalism

a) *Basic information* - The project entitled «A Campaign for the Establishment of Zaječar-Vidin-Kalafat Triangle Cooperation» is carried out within a broader campaign for the establishment of triangle cooperation in the whole region of Southeast Europe. In 2003 and 2004, on the basis of the positive experience with Tuzla-Osijek-Novi Sad triangle cooperation, the Center for Regionalism conducted a campaign for the formation of ten or so triangles of this kind, including Zaječar–Vidin–Kalafat triangle cooperation. The activities will be continued in the course of 2005. The Center for Regionalism cooperates with municipal authorities and local non-governmental organizations in the implementation of this project. The intention is to set up the Association of Multiethnic Cities on the basis of the existing triangles of cooperation among the cities in the SEE region. The project is carried out with the support of the Civil Pact for SEE, Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Serbia and Montenegro, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and OSCE Mission in Belgrade.

b) *Project description* - The project objective is the promotion of regional cooperation and regional tolerance, as well as SME development. It is held that the end results will attain the project objectives in full. As stated by the respondents, the major advantages and benefits of this research are SME development, identification of the supply and demand on both markets, as well as citizens' needs.

c) *Cooperation* - Communication and coordination of joint work on the project was evaluated as very good and the expert potential of the NGO partner as good.

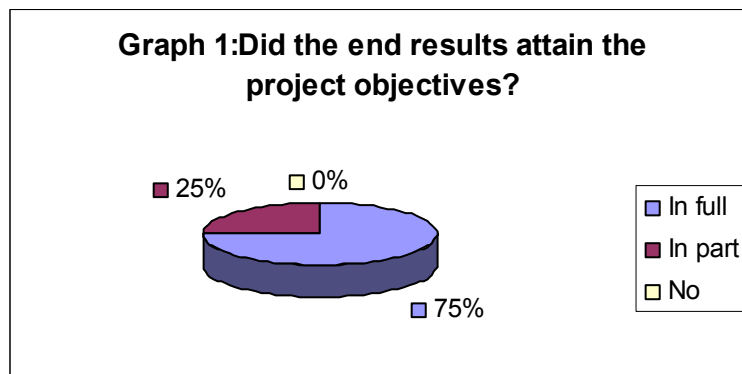
d) *Transfer of knowledge* - Knowing the fact about each other's economic and political situation was evaluated as insufficient. As for similarities/differences between economic and political processes in the two countries, it is recognized that there are similarities but the approaches to problem solving differ to a considerable extent, so that the transfer of knowledge may enable even better results.

e) *Donors' role* - The donors have a partial vision of the development of a strategy for regional cooperation, while the research on the process of EU accession is at the medium priority level for the donors.

Synthetic Analysis

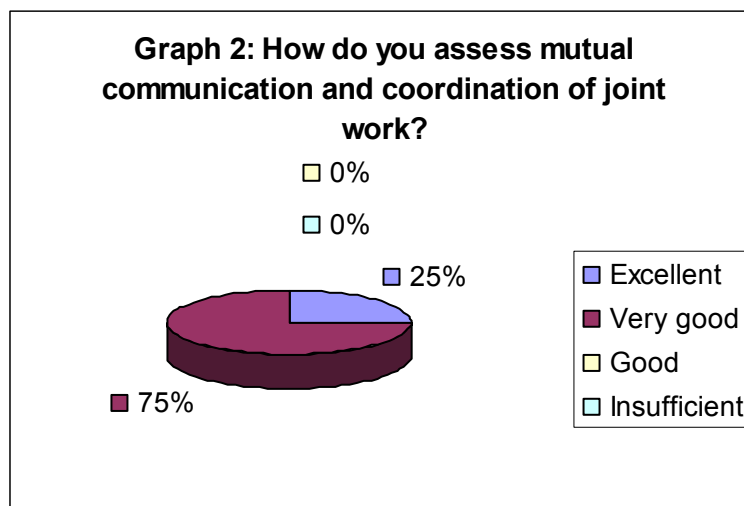
- In answering the question as to whether the results, stemming from cooperation in joint projects, have attained the project objectives, three-fourths of the surveyed NGOs in Serbia stated that the end results attained the aims in full, while

one-quarter answered that they succeeded only in part. These answers show that the Serbian NGOs have a relatively positive opinion about the success of cooperation with their Bulgarian partners.



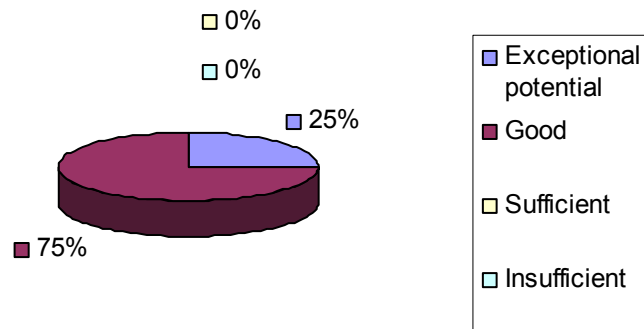
- The major advantages of cooperation in the realization of joint projects are the possibility of becoming better acquainted with the neighbouring country and making a comparison with the situation in Serbia, as well as the exchange of relevant experiences, especially through direct contacts with the main exponents of EU integration in Bulgaria. In the opinion of Serbian NGOs, the major weaknesses of this cooperation lie in the fact that this exchange of experiences remains limited to a relatively narrow circle of direct participants and that each country has its specifics, so that it is impossible to rely just on the experience of the other country. The limiting factor is also the duration of such cooperation arising from the implementation of joint projects, because it is time-framed and confined to the duration of a joint project; there is no monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations deriving from joint projects, especially if the projects are carried out at the regional level.
- As for the activities that had the greatest influence on the attainment of the project objectives, the most frequent answers were as follows: the gathering of information and their analysis, joint meetings of the research teams at which the results were adjusted and presented, as well as the publishing of the brochures disclosing the results of research.
- All surveyed NGOs in Serbia emphasized that they would like to cooperate with the Bulgarian NGOs in the same or similar area in which they already established cooperation, especially because their hitherto cooperation is regarded as very successful. It was also pointed out that bilateral cooperation between the two countries was neglected and much below the possibilities and needs of the two countries. Also, the level of cooperation was lower than one might conclude on the basis of official statements.
- As for the specific topics that were dealt with through the realization of joint projects mention was made of the following:
 - The role of the judiciary in European integration;
 - Research on the development level of specified segments of the financial markets in Bulgaria and Serbia;

- The status, role and financing of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- In assessing the quality of cooperation with the Bulgarian counterparts, all surveyed NGOs from Serbia pointed to the high level of cooperation and professionalism of these institutions. In their view, the main reasons for successful cooperation are a good expert potential, readiness to work as a team, understanding of the joint objective and the existence of common values.
- In answering the question how they evaluate mutual communication and coordination of joint work, three-quarters of the surveyed Serbian NGOs evaluated cooperation as excellent and one-quarter as very good. The answers show that mutual communication and coordination of joints activities by Serbian NGOs was evaluated as relatively successful.



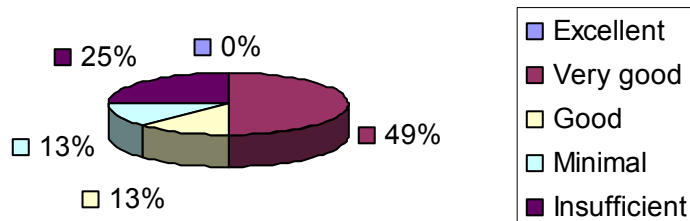
- Insofar as the recommendations for the promotion of future cooperation between the NGOs in the two countries are concerned, it was stated that it would be good to have a follow-up on these projects, through which the monitoring mechanism would be established and the recommendations given within the joint projects could be perceived.
- In answering the question as to their evaluation of the expert potential of the Bulgarian NGOs with which they had cooperated, three-quarters of the Serbian NGOs evaluated this potential as good and one-fourth as exceptional. On the basis of their answers we can conclude that the Serbian NGOs evaluate the expert potential of the Bulgarian NGOs as very good.

Graph 3: What is your evaluation of the expert potential of your NGO partner?



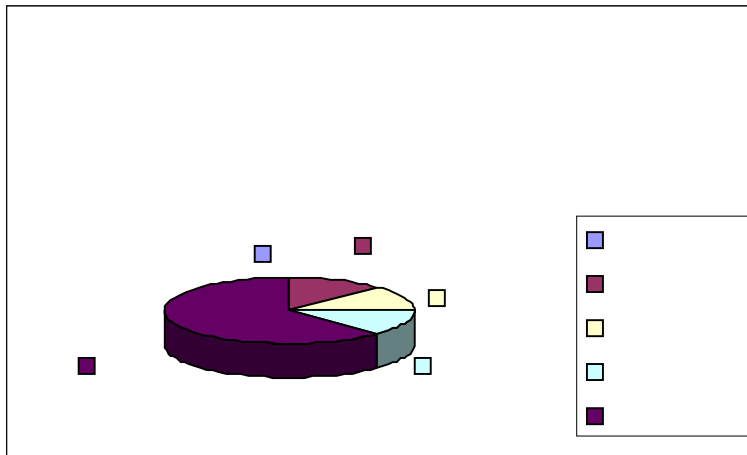
- In the section devoted to the recommendations for the strengthening of cooperation among NGOs from the countries in this region it was stated that for the attainment of this objective would require the greatest possible number of joint projects being of significance at the national and regional levels. It would also be necessary to ensure a systematic exchange of information, as well as the formation and strengthening of institutions for support to the development of the region.
- In answering the question as to the extent to which the Bulgarian NGOs are acquainted with the economic and political situation in Serbia, 40% of Serbian NGOs answered that their knowledge was very good, 13% that it was good, 13% that it was minimal and 25% that it was insufficient. On the basis of these answers it can be concluded that, in the opinion of their counterparts in Serbia, Bulgarian NGOs are relatively well acquainted with the economic and political situation in Serbia.

Graph 4: How do you evaluate the knowledge of Bulgarian NGOs insofar as the economic and political situation in Serbia is concerned?



- On the basis of the question as to how much the Serbian NGOs are acquainted with the economic and political situation in Bulgaria, 62% of the surveyed NGOs in Serbia stated that their knowledge is insufficient, 13% that it is minimal, 12%

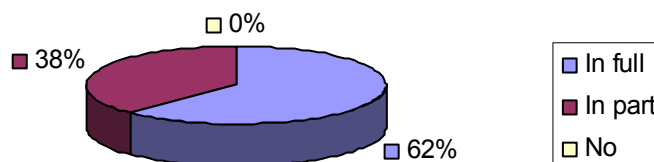
that it is good and 12% that it is very good. On the basis of the answers it can be concluded that most NGOs in Serbia know nothing, or have only the basic idea about the economic and political situation in Bulgaria. The answers to this and previous questions point out that the Bulgarian NGOs are much better acquainted with the economic and political situation in Serbia than vice versa.



- As for the similarities and differences between economic and political processes in Bulgaria and Serbia, in addition to their most striking similarity – both countries are in transition, it was stated that, apart from some former Yugoslav republics, Bulgaria is most similar to Serbia in a cultural, economic and political sense. At the moment, the major difference lies in the fact that Bulgaria made greater progress towards EU accession than Serbia.
- The existing similarities and differences between Bulgaria and Serbia could best be used for the promotion of cooperation through the organization of special projects for NGOs from both countries, which would make a comparison of the situation in the two countries and acquaint experts and the general public with the results of their research. The mentioned objectives could be attained by organizing joint conferences, visits of guest lecturers, as well as joint research so as to compare the results and transfer knowledge and information.
- According to the results of this survey, the following areas of research will be of interest for bilateral cooperation in the next five years:
 - Bulgaria and Serbia in Euro-Atlantic integration;
 - Intensification of economic, political, security and cultural cooperation;
 - Joint struggle against cross-border crime and terrorism;
 - Transport, energy and communication corridors;
 - National minorities;
 - Promotion and advancement of human and civil rights and the values of civil society;
 - Foreign direct investment;
 - Business legislation and
 - Adoption and implementation of the standards (ISO, CE, HACCP).

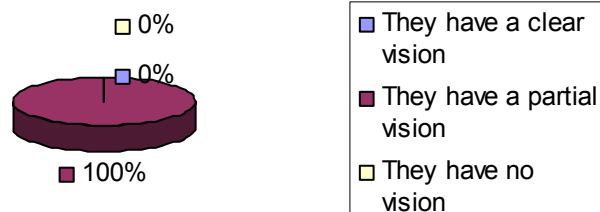
- As for the donors' role and their influence on the selection of the topics, which were the subject of cooperation already, all surveyed NGOs from Serbia agree that these topics have been formulated in such a way that they meet the requirements of the country's economic policy and ongoing reform processes.
- Insofar as the rules for participation in the donors' program and their influence on the work on joint projects are concerned, one half of Serbian NGOs finds that the rules improve their work, while the other half states that the rules are frequently a limiting factor in their work on joint projects. Therefore, it can be concluded that the rules and procedures governing the approach to the donors' programs provide additional education relating to the adoption and observance of the principles of transparency and openness and that the excessive requirements (especially those of an administrative nature) may lessen the effects of the programs themselves, as well as the efficiency of their implementation.
- In answering the question as to whether the objective of the jointly realized projects has been selected in accordance with the two countries' social priorities, it can be concluded that most NGOs in Serbia agree that the project objectives have been selected relatively well and that they are in conformity with the current social priorities in both countries.

Graph 6: Have the project objectives been selected in accordance with the two countries' social priorities?

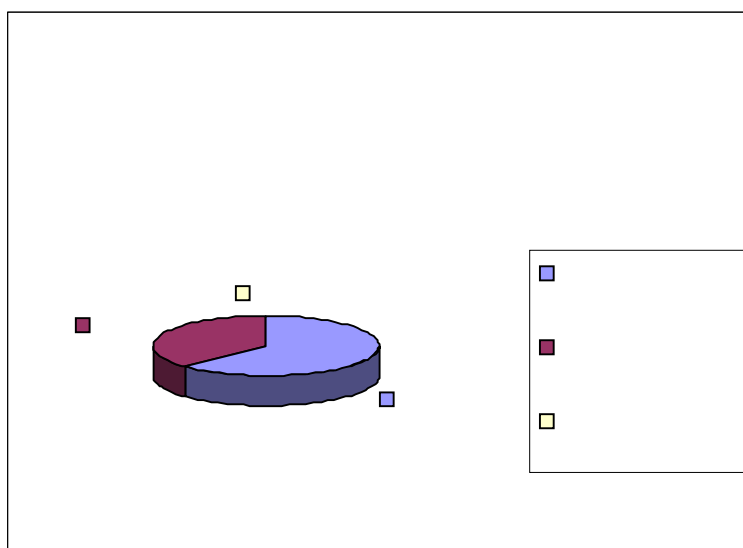


- The donors' role has also been perceived through the answers to the question as to the extent to which the donors have a vision of the development of a regional cooperation strategy. In this regard, all respondents agree that the donors have a partial vision of the promotion of cooperation, on the basis of which it can be concluded that – through adequate communication and cooperation with donors' institutions - it will be possible to establish the priorities in future cooperation more adequately, thus ensuring the more efficient use of the available resources.

Graph 7: Do the donors have the vision as to the development of a strategy for regional cooperation?



- As to the question whether research on the process of EU accession falls among the donors' priorities, 62% of the surveyed NGOs in Serbia holds that this area enjoys the highest priority, while 38% of the respondents said that this issue is at the medium level of donors' priorities. Therefore, it can be concluded that the programs relating to the process of EU accession are represented in donors' institutions in a relatively satisfactory way. However, most Serbian NGOs hold that the donors are fairly prepared to support the projects focusing on economic transition, i.e. to support economic policy on the path to EU accession. The topics and areas to which the donors are oriented to a greater extent are the advancement of civil society and democracy, protection of human rights, status of minorities, etc.



- As for the question about the extent to which the executive authorities are aware of the process of integration into the EU and its advantages and weaknesses, the Serbian NGOs hold that the Government and ministries are aware and informed, and that the government administration is not sufficiently acquainted with this process, and that it has no adequate capacities for the implementation of these processes so that this segment needs the assistance of civil society institutions.

SWOT Analysis of NGO Cooperation in Project Development

The development of civil society and NGOs in both countries (similarly to many other systems) follows a spiral road – ascending movement till reaching a certain summit, then a certain stagnation and taking a step back until internal resources are mobilized for further ascension to the next circle of the spiral. Our observations in this project show that the development of the NGO sectors in the two countries (though following the spiral way) is at different section of the spiral, which allows interaction between them to accelerate the development of that sector in each of the countries. In this sense the interaction and a well-structured dialogue between the two sectors can turn into a driver for bi-lateral relations in general.

The carried out survey of joint projects between Serbian and Bulgarian organizations makes it possible to draw the characteristics of the NGO sectors in Bulgarian and in Serbia, to identify basic differences and similarities. In general the organization, functioning and development of the NGOs in the two countries share a lot of similarities. A major characteristic is the lack of sustainability in the development, expressed in the fact, that after their origination and the implementation of some projects their activities gradually slow down and disappear. Differences can be sought in the process of NGO origination: There exist NGOs in Serbia, which have originated through transforming old/existing state structures (research institutes), as well as in the extent of impact on society and on central power (Bulgarian NGOs tend to have a stronger impact and better contacts with the central and the local authorities).

In order to achieve the goal of this project it is necessary to structure the opportunities for mutual assistance of the movement in both countries in the progress to their EU accession, it is necessary to develop a quality SWOT analysis. This will give us the basis to identify common interests and to initiate specific activities to promote the development of future cooperation, stepping on the strengths of the joint NGO work so far, and outlining the plan for the adequate usage of these opportunities to build, and to improve.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Further strengthening of the relations between the two countries, which is one of the important elements on the path to EU accession;- Similarities in economic and political processes;- Similarities of the foreign and economic policy aims;- Coincidence of social and economic priorities;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- There are no traditions and no significant contacts between different communities (social, civic, professional and territorial) from Bulgaria and Serbia and the NGOs that represent them;- Degree of development of bi-lateral relations (including cooperation between NGOs) does not meet the interests of the two countries;- Insufficient knowledge of the facts

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need for harmonization with the EU standards; - It is accepted by both countries that citizens' organizations are important subjects in policy making; - NGOs in both countries are very flexible and apt to cooperation; - A great extent of similarity and compatibility in the organization of work of NGOs in both countries; - Relatively good communications between NGOs and the central government in Bulgaria; - Successful cooperation so far in developing joint projects; - Extensive experience in developing of common attitudes and positions; - Local research organizations have a direct access to the source of information; - Presence of good expert potential in both countries; - Availability of projects, pointed at practical issues like enabling the establishment of business relations and SME development. 	<p>about the economic and political situation in the other country;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge about potential partners is limited; - Lack of good organization in cooperation; - Lack of sustainability in the development of NGOs; - Coordination between NGOs in the two countries is sometimes quite complicated; - Cooperation among NGOs is limited only to the period of the implementation of joint projects; - Exchange of experiences remains limited to a relatively narrow circle of direct participants; - Frequent absence of efficient monitoring and failure to implement the recommendations; - Many Serbian NGOs have not yet developed capacity to work on the problems of EU integration; - Not so good communication between Serbian NGOs and central government; - Problem selection by donors is not always equally important for both partners.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Similarities in economic and political processes; - Similarities of the foreign and economic policy aims; - Coincidence of social and economic priorities; - European integration and EU driven reforms are assessed to be among the most important spheres of bilateral cooperation; - The need of harmonization with the EU standards; - Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs have gathered some experience to support policy making in the area of EU integration and communicate EU driven reforms; - The changes in Serbia create conditions for initiating a new type of interrelations on the level of NGOs and civil society; - Existing problems of common interest, on which partners can work together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historical mistrust and prejudice makes some NGOs to direct their efforts to cooperation with representatives of other countries and regions; - Donors have a partial vision of the development of a strategy for regional cooperation; - Donors' rules for participation in the support programs often restrict work on projects; - Support to economic policy on the path to EU accession is not the donors' highest priority; - Neglecting the specifics of each country, which are frequently very important for the success of reforms.

(jointly solving regional problems); - Coincidence of the interesting areas of research in the coming period; - The possibility of getting acquainted with someone else's experience, preventing possible errors and implementing the best solutions at the national level; - Transfer of knowledge, exchange of information at joint scientific meetings, through bulletins, guest lecturers, web site, etc.; - Joint work and exchange of experience provides opportunity to build and improve expertise; - A few contacts developed with suitable and quality partners deserve and need to be continued and active; - Donors' readiness to support regional projects.	
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Conclusions from the survey

Intrinsically, NGOs are more flexible and open to cooperation with other organizations, and the local and central governments, which gives them an opportunity to contribute to the further development and optimization of bi-lateral cooperation. Promoting the European idea, preparing the public for the responsibilities of the EU membership, assisting the governing in the process of clarification, formulation and pursuit of the national interests in the process of EU accession are the areas, in which NGOs can act very successfully.

In view of the integration trends in both countries, NGOs emerge as an important link between citizens and policy-making. Trans-border cooperation is in a position to augment the potentialities of NGOs to successfully participate in the process of European integration driven reforms and EU accession on the basis not only of own expertise but foreign too. Though being successful the trans-border cooperation of Serbian and Bulgarian NGOs could not be considered sustainable if it is not based on clearly defined structures and mechanisms of this cooperation to ensure the dynamics of the process and make it self-driven and self-sustained. NGOs are in a strong position to contribute to the development of bilateral cooperation, for drawing the two countries to the stage of EU accession.

The Bulgarian NGOs have accumulated experience and skills to deal and cope with the challenges of the process of identification of society-significant problems and the

selection of adequate solutions for society. The process of needs analysis, identification of interests, the development of adequate policy options, advocacy for their implementation is well worked and familiar, and NGOs continuously increase their impact on the public and gain the society respect. Due to their ability to generate and “market” new ideas, and due to their good relations with the central government, Bulgarian NGOs are often contacted for consultations and mediation, their studies and proposals are presented before the citizens and the government.

The Serbian NGOs though, have not yet developed traditions and sustainable capacity to work on the issues related to European integration at the level, at which Bulgarian NGOs have been working, perhaps due to the fact that the EU perspective to them still seems not quite clear and is not a powerful stimulus for the civil community. This opens the space for exchange of experience, accumulation of expertise and organizing cooperation between the Serbian NGOs themselves, the interrelations among which are somewhat not quite organized or sustainable. This will allow on its hand to accomplish clear identification of the strong Serbian NGOs with the possibility for a successful participation in the policy making process. Since Bulgaria is among the few countries whose expertise in Serbia is well accepted, the cooperation between the NGOs can have a significant contribution to the image making of local partners, for strengthening their self-esteem as possible participants in the policy making, and eventually – for the development and the strengthening of the third sector in Serbia. This has been demonstrated in the findings from the surveys of projects and the meetings that the team has carried out in Bulgaria with participating experts and managers of the various projects.

NGOs in Serbia can be a crucial connecting unit between the citizens and policy makers. At the moment this unit is not quite active, it holds the public hopes, but it is not well organized and does not work efficiently. NGOs can focus the governmental institutions to the society’s priorities, processes and areas and can work for their optimization. One of these priorities is the EU integration and Serbia’s accession to the common European family. In this respect attention should be paid to the further development and strengthening of the NGO sector in Serbia and in this a significant role can take the Bulgarian NGO sector. It is very important to work specifically and locally, with strictly individual approach in the resolving of problems, depending on the place and image of the particular NGO in society, depending on its capacity to communicate successfully with representatives of the various sectors in the country, on the local procedures and practices, in such a way – to provide the needed and suitable expertise and assistance.

The joint efforts of NGOs from both countries can assist policy makers in the process of policy formulation and implementation, focused at Serbia’s integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures (similarly to that of Bulgaria) so that the public in Serbia can overcome the mistrust and can work in support of these processes. The bi-lateral cooperation increases the capabilities of NGOs to participate in the integration processes through the identification of common goals and objectives, identification of similarities and ways and implementation of already life-tested procedures.

It is necessary to identify those NGOs in the two countries, which work successfully in this area and to promote the cooperation between them. It is recommendable to build network/s of such organizations, which can work on common problems and

issues and which can inform continuously the public about the results of their joint work. These networks will enable the establishing and further development of close cooperation and joint work on bi-lateral projects and initiatives in support of both countries' integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations and space.

It is of major significance to identify *perspective* partners in the NGO sector in Serbia, and most Bulgarian NGOs surveyed have already established contacts. With such partners it is possible to work successfully on projects. Such partners can turn into the skeleton of civil society in Serbia in the process of establishing and approving the EU orientation of the country. Acceptance of common European values and European standards in the bi-lateral relations creates positive basis for strengthening of cooperation and presents a clear milestone for the priorities of the two countries.

The active functioning of networks of NGOs with databases of experts lies in the basis of sustainable cooperation. Communication between NGOs from both countries needs clear structuring and focus on areas of common interest and the exchange of good practices assisting the policy and decision-making processes, assisting the public in realizing the character of the global and specific processes. It is necessary to seek and accentuate on identity in the on-going processes, and to focus on positive experience and similarities of the countries, to notice possible risk for mistakes or disadvantages and to put efforts to prevent them.

The efficiency of cooperation between the Serbian and Bulgarian NGOs depends a lot on the environment, in which it develops – the political and economic mutual efforts on the inter-state level. The accumulated experience on joint projects and the established contacts should be used in the process of assisting EU orientation and in sharing experience concerning participation in EU or Council of Europe programmes and initiatives in the areas of trans-border cooperation. The cooperation so far in the implementation of joint projects creates the conditions for building of trust and applying common methods of research, formulation of common conclusions, which reflect the specific expertise and position of each of the countries.

Our experience till now shows that there is a strong interest among NGOs to join efforts, thus intensifying the process of trans-border cooperation through exchanging expertise. The NGOs interested in participating in the trans-border cooperation need to gather and establish better mutual communication and coordination to boost cooperation of the NGOs interested in trans-border cooperation and joint work. Better cooperation should be established, first among the NGO themselves, and then with the authorities and international institutions/organizations and donors.

Our aim is to create a strategy that would make possible greater involvement of the NGOs in the process of trans-border cooperation and EU integration through promoting policy dialogue and public debate and reaching more effective communication.

We are strongly convinced that trans-border cooperation and development of lasting partnerships should not be overlooked anymore, and the potential should be utilized, because it will contribute principally to EU structural development, and European economic stability in particular. Through specific concrete joint activities both sides will facilitate the integration in the EU organism, through deeper understanding of

common realities and goals, and the mobilization to solve only seemingly regional, but actually – common European goals of integration, stability and security.

The question now is how to involve the Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs in the processes of the trans-border cooperation and increase their role in improving trans-border cooperation and further EU integration. NGOs from the two countries have to join efforts to contribute to the economic policy development and implementation in both countries. They have the sources and mechanisms to create linkages and boost policy dialogue for reinforcing regional cooperation and EU integration.

A Strategy

for Trans-border Cooperation Between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs in Promoting the EU Integration Process

Introduction

Exploring the picture of joint activities, projects and cooperation between Serbian and Bulgarian NGOs, and analysing the state of this cooperation, CED and the EcInst tried to develop a strategy for structuring the trans-border partnership, and assist to shape it based on a long-term vision for development of both countries within the EU framework, and not just incidental initiatives.

As NGOs, it is our determination to raise public awareness and inform citizens about our research results and possibility to influence decision-making and to implement those results in reality. One of our major goals is transforming analyses into effective decisions and policies. Our organizations are in place to correct governmental policies through independent professional opinions, comments and suggestions.

This strategy is developed as a result of the analysis of cooperation between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs in joint projects realization. This strategy could be an important document for donors' policy implementation.

The strategy reports all recommendations of surveyed NGOs and gives directions of future joint work. Our aim is to define the vision of our future cooperation, the strategic goals and the priorities of bilateral NGO cooperation, as well as to give reasons for adequate actions for implementing these goals. Thus, the strategy will be used as a background for the development of concrete action plan for implementing strategic goals and priorities.

Referring to the near start of Serbian negotiations with the EU on Stabilization and Association Agreement, the strategy is designed to cover a short period of time (up to two years) and a longer term (up to five years). This time frame will ensure transfer of knowledge and experience between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs in the period of starting negotiations with the EU (for Serbia) and the accession of Bulgaria to full membership.

The level and the efficiency of trans-border NGO cooperation depend mainly on the state of development of the participants but the environment for the process is an important factor, too. The proposed strategy will serve as a proper mode of interaction thus improving the environment of cooperation. The development of NGO cooperation could set up the bases of tradition building in trans-border cooperation between municipalities, business associations and national authorities. The proposed

mechanism for cooperation will complement the so far elaborated set of mechanisms for advancing trans-border interaction.

The main principles of NGO cooperation should be:

- Building confidence and mutual understanding;
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of project development;
- Coordination of projects' activities;
- Sharing experience in specific policy issues;
- Establishing NGO network to ensure sustained cooperation.

Background

EU enlargement

The promise of EU membership proved a powerful incentive allowing policy-makers to push through difficult and at times unpopular reforms in their national constituencies. The incredible changes that have taken place in accession countries, a great deal of which was specifically geared toward satisfying the EU entry requirements, are indisputable proof for that. The adoption of the European standards of democratic and economic governance, even if not leading to EU membership, are crucial for developing cooperation between Bulgaria and Serbia.

In view of the fact that both countries are in the process of transition, the implementation of joint projects contributes to the transfer of knowledge and exchange of experiences. Thus, they are of mutual benefit for speeding up the transition of the two countries' economies and the fastest possible accession to the European Union. Instantly, government administration is not sufficiently acquainted with this process and it has no adequate capacity for the implementation of the requirements of the integration process. So, this segment needs the assistance of civil society institutions. Cooperation between NGOs strengthens the relations among countries still further, which is one of the most essential elements of EU accession.

Bulgarian experience

In the past years the development of Bulgaria has been characterized by significant changes, restructuring and reforms in the economy, related to the country's transition to a market economy and its integration into "the bigger European family". Bulgarian NGOs can share their experience and expertise in the area of economic reforms and active participation of non-government sector in Bulgaria's EU accession processes, in order to assist the responsible involvement and engagement of the Serbian NGOs in similar processes in their country, now happening or about to happen.

As a leading economic policy think tank in Bulgaria and participant in these processes the CED has acquired a significant expertise and experience in exploring, development, analysis and formulation in the economic development area. CED has initiated and has been a major proponent for the organization of a professional debate on the state of the Bulgarian economy with leading experts, government official, representatives of the NGO sector, industrial associations, and business organizations for providing quality information to the Bulgarian public and society on the progress of Bulgaria's accession, on the challenges and risks, the country will face and will

have to cope on its way to the EU. CED's useful expertise can assist instrumentally the future accession of Serbia into the EU.

Serbian perspectives

The role of the Serbian NGO sector in this process should be very significant, as organizers and mediators of the dialogue between the government and the representatives of civil society representatives, professional economic community, experts, the business and the main stakeholders. It is particularly important for the Serbian NGO sector to voice its position professionally, and use the momentum to promote the reform and integration process, applying the positive experience and the lessons learned by the Bulgarian partners, in the process of Bulgaria's EU accession. Serbia is to continue carrying through tough economic reforms. The foundation for a marked and sustained improvement in the economic situation cannot be laid without necessary, but painful, drastic structural reforms should be carried out in view of economic development and accession process. Bulgaria has already got through these reforms but it has a long way to go to implement all the legislature, procedures and standards crucial for its full membership in the EU.

Vision of the Strategy:

As we are fully convinced that joint projects implementation is raising regional security and is having a lasting effect by contributing to the sustainability of joint cross-border efforts for achieving mutually beneficial goals, and meeting the European agenda on the Balkans, we propose the following definition for strategic vision of bilateral NGO cooperation:

Promoting European integration by raising awareness on various aspects of the process to assure regional security and prosperity.

The strategy will help us clarify our vision and expectations about the real steps to be undertaken to accelerate the process of EU integration on the Balkans and contribute principally to EU structural development, and European economic stability in particular.

Strategic Goal:

Accomplishment of effective cooperation between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs through joint projects for exchanging experiences and launching new joint initiatives on the way of economic reforms and restructuring in both countries to prepare for desired integration and EU accession.

Bilateral cooperation so far has been neglected and is much below the possibilities and needs of the two countries.

This goal could be reached by:

- Determining the socio-economic characteristics of Serbia and comparing them with the characteristics of Bulgaria during its accession progress.

- Identification of the common needs.
- Determining on the grounds for cooperation.
- Sharing of lessons learnt on the path of EU integration.

The objectives of the Strategy are:

1. To raise awareness on the various aspects of European integration, the enlargement process and the impact of accession.
2. To facilitate Serbia's integration in the EU organism through specific concrete joint activities of Serbian and Bulgarian NGOs.
3. To contribute directly to closer European integration of Serbia.
4. To increase the visibility of the European Union across the country.
5. To ensure follow-up of joint projects.

Priorities:

The Strategy priorities include promotion of the enlargement and accession process and raising the public awareness through:

- The establishment of new partnerships and networks of Serbian civil society organisations / non-profit organisations with Bulgarian counterparts according to their field of activity, to initiate a dialogue, to exchange knowledge, information and best practices related to the EU integration process.
- The development of joint decisions and successful practices in approaching decision makers and advocating reform development.
- Exchanging expertise and establishing better mutual communication and coordination for the purposes of achieving greater results.
- The organisation of events and forums to allow debates between civil society organisations / non-profit organisations in order to promote a better knowledge and understanding of the European Union within Serbia, including the values on which it is founded, its functioning and its policies.
- The organisation of events and forums to allow debates between civil society organisations / non-profit organisations in order to ensure a better knowledge and understanding of Serbia within the European Union, including its history and its culture, thus allowing for a better awareness of the opportunities and challenges of future enlargement in a multicultural Europe.
- To promote policy dialogue and public debate, raise public awareness and inform citizens.
- To correct governmental policies through independent professional opinions, comments and suggestions.
- To establish better cooperation among the NGO themselves, and with the authorities and international institutions/organizations and donors.

Areas of joint interest as defined by the surveyed Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs:

On central level:

- Euro-Atlantic integration;
- Economic policy reforms;
- Improved legislation: preparation for EU membership (priorities and obligations to be fulfilled);
- Trans-border cooperation: Building a consistent cross-border understanding of the common realities and focusing on joint work will add to the quality of accession and will multiply the efficiency of efforts;
- Intensification of bilateral economic, political, security and cultural cooperation;
- Joint struggle against cross-border crime and terrorism;
- Human and civil rights and the values of civil society;
- Transport, energy and communication corridors, as the lever of mutual cooperation;
- Foreign direct investment;
- Business environment, and
- National minorities.

On local level:

- Promotion of regional cooperation and regional tolerance;
- SME development;
- Financial sector development;
- Human management;
- Basics of finance for managers;
- Strategic management;
- Adoption and implementation of the standards (ISO, CE, HACCP);
- Operative planning and budgeting, and
- Elaboration of business plans.

Measures for Implementing Strategic Goals and Priorities:

- More effective promotion of bilateral projects;
- Establishment of effectively working network of Serbian and Bulgarian NGOs;
- Regular holding of consultative meetings and all kinds of events (conferences, round tables, seminars, workshops, etc.) to share experience and knowledge;
- Publication of projects' results and dissemination of deliverables among potential users;
- Identification of mechanisms for overcoming the obstacles in bilateral cooperation;
- Identification of mechanisms for joint solving of common problems;
- Transforming analyses into effective decisions and policies;

Monitoring and Coordination of the Strategy:

- To develop a mechanism of efficient monitoring
- To ensure implementation of recommendations made
- To ensure a systematic exchange of information
- To create necessary institutions for monitoring and support of joint projects development

ACTION PLAN

for Trans-border Cooperation Between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs in Promoting the EU Integration Process

<p>PROBLEM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Accomplishment of greater involvement of the NGOs in the process of trans-border cooperation and EU integration through promoting policy dialogue and public debate and reaching more effective communication;➤ Building on current cooperation and making it closer through involving a greater number of NGOs;➤ Providing donors with more realistic information about the needs of the region in order to enable better coordination and targeting of donor funds.➤ Insufficient knowledge of the facts about the economic and political situation in the other country;➤ Lack of a more systematic cooperation, lasting beyond the specific projects.	<p>TARGET GROUPS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The competent state institutions, governing and implementing the accession process and the bi-lateral relations;➤ Organizations of the business communities, NGOs, academia, and other organizations at the national, industry, municipal levels in associations, cross-border or Euro-region's organizations.
<p>PURPOSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on the experience gained in the accession process in Bulgaria and lessons learned, to recommend actions, which provide for more opportunities for reforms during negotiations.• Transfer of knowledge and experience related to EU accession process, involving additional groups of NGOs from the two countries for active bi-lateral cooperation.	<p>INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The political powers, state governance bodies, state institutions, involved in the accession activities; parliamentary committees on EU accession; the media and organizations of civil society.

<p>IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To identify actions and measures, which will promote the accession process and all activities related to it; 2. To identify actions and measures, which will assist the implementation of efficient involvement, monitoring and control on behalf of NGOs in the bi-lateral and accession relations. 3. To put pressure on the Governments in both countries to improve and promote bi-lateral relations, and to build the common vision of the Balkans. 	<p>INDICATORS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provision of active participation on behalf of the NGOs as important partners in the public awareness campaign and in the accession process itself; 2. Provision of institutional and legislative-regulatory inclusion of the NGO partners in the accession process implementation. 3. The number of joint projects, and the number of NGOs involved. 4. The speed of harmonizing and integration with the EU in both countries.
<p>RESULTS:</p> <p>Prospective results from the implementation of these actions and measures are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased advocacy of NGOs for the EU process and dissemination of information; 2. Increased public awareness and thus - support for the reforms, and the EU accession process through providing access to more information about it; 3. Efficient involvement of experts through the NGOs in the negotiation process, and civil control on the work of Government agencies, involved and responsible for the process; 4. Improved quality of proposed accession documents/materials due to the influence of NGOs joint projects; 5. Purposeful actions on behalf of governmental institutions to use the expertise of NGOs in activating the bi-lateral cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria, and in using the Bulgarian experience in the accession process of Serbia; 6. Increased capacity and provided better cooperation of NGOs on a sustainable basis through networking. 	
<p>ACTIVITIES:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make a list of NGOs with joint projects to use them as the basis for networking. 2. Identify areas and topics for future cooperation based on the needs of Serbia and Bulgaria and their NGO communities. 3. Identify governmental institutions and agencies working for EU accession, regional and bi-lateral cooperation. 4. Exchange of information and communication on a continuous basis. 5. CED in Bulgaria and Economics Institute in Serbia take the responsibility of formally working to coordinate activities and disseminate information. 	

RESOURCES:

The implementation of the action plan requires the mobilization of the active NGOs in both countries, and external the attraction of foreign resources, and donors:

- To attract EU donors' attention and assist them to form a more realistic vision of the local communities problems.
- To diversify donors.
- To put pressure on governments in each country for activating bi-lateral, and regional cooperation in the area of EU accession.

PREREQUISITES:

1. The existing active NGOs and their partnerships with good practices for dialogue and cooperation;
2. The focus and interest of donor organizations for the region of the Balkans.

TENTATIVE PROVISIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. CED in Bulgaria and EI in Serbia will identify a person to provide coordination for active communication with all stakeholders in the process.
2. Provide the list of Agencies of the other country to Government organizations in Bulgaria and in Serbia, and to monitor and press for improving bi-lateral cooperation and to put it on a sustainable, continuous basis.

APPLICATIONS

ANNEX 1: A LIST OF NGOs IN BULGARIA AND SERBIA COVERED BY THE SURVEY

NGOs IN BULGARIA AND SERBIA COVERED BY THE SURVEY

Item No.	NGO – Serbia	Contact person	Title of the joint project	NGO – Bulgaria	Contact person
1.	Economics Institute, Belgrade	Jelena Galić, Executive Director tel.: +381 11 3613 118, email: jgalic@ecinst.org.yu	«Restructuring of the Financial Sector in South East Europe»	Institute for Economic Policy, Sofia	Elitsa Markova, tel.: +359 /2/ 980 1059 epi@epi-bg.org
2.	Institute for European Studies, Belgrade	Jovan Teokarević, Researcher tel. +381 11 3398 891, email: jes@eunet.yu	«How to Use the Bulgarian Experience with Transition in Serbia»	European Institute, Sofia	Darina Kadounkova, tel.: +359 /2/ 988 6405 dkadounkova@europeaninstitute.net
3.	Belgrade Center for European Integration	Jovan Teokarević, Director tel. +381 11 2464 180, email: jovteo@eunet.yu	«Support to the Mutual Understanding of Relations and the EU – West Balkan Dialogue»	European Institute, Sofia	Darina Kadounkova, tel.: +359 /2/ 988 6405 dkadounkova@europeaninstitute.net
4.	Center for Euro-Balkan Integration, Belgrade	Radmila Nakarada, Researcher tel. +381 11 2698 658, email: nakara@eunet.yu	«Yugoslavia and Bulgaria: Good European Neighbors»	Center for Liberal Strategies, Sofia	Anna Ganeva, tel.: +359 /2/ 981 8926, anna@clssofia.org
5.	Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, Podgorica	Dragana Radević, Program Director tel. +381 81 620 611, email: cfepg@cg.yu	«Financing of the SME Sector in South East Europe»	Center for Economic Development, Sofia	G. Prohasky, tel. 359 /2/ 953 4204 G.Prohaski@ced.bg
6.	Education Center, Leskovac	Igor Stajić, Executive Director tel. +381 16 215 413, email: edcentar@ptt.yu	«Top Management»	Black Sea – Adriatic, Sofia	
7.	Forum for Civil Rights, Niš	Jadranka Jović, President tel. +381 18 361 118, email: forumnis@eunet.yu	«Democratization and Local Development of the Bulgarian-Serbian Relations»	Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia	Marin Lesenski, +359 /2/ 971 12 27 lessenskim@iname.com
8.	Center for Regionalism, Novi Sad	Radomir Šovljanski, Program Coordinator tel. +381 21 528 241, email: igman@nscable.net	«Campaign for the Establishment of Zaječar – Vidin – Kalafat Triangle Cooperation»	Potential partner: Balkan Political Club, Sofia	

BULGARIAN NGOS COVERED BY THE SURVEY

No	Organization	Priority Areas/Mission of the organization	Project Partner
1	Center for Economic Development G. Prohasky, Co-chair Tel.: +359 /2/ 953-42-04 G.Prohasky@ced.bg www.ced.bg	Competitiveness and Economic Growth; Public Finance; IC Technologies, Innovation Policy; Labor and Social Policies; Enterprise Policy, Business Environment; Infrastructure -Energy and Transport; Fight against Corruption, Public Procurement; EU Accession, Foreign Economic Relations of Bulgaria; Corporate Governance; Financial Sector; Economic Statistics; Environmental Policy; Access to Reliable Economic Information	Project: Development of Social Policies to Accompany Privatization (January 2002 - May 2003) Partner: European Movement in Serbia
2	Institute for Market Economics Krasen Stanchev Ph. D., Executive Director stanchev@ime.bg www.ime-bg.org tel.: +359 /2/ 943 33 52, 943 36 48, 943 49 75, 944 71 19	EU Accession and Integration; Pension, Healthcare and Education Reform; Administrative and Regulatory Reforms, Private Provision of Public Services; Internet Provision of Economic Knowledge via EASI; Reforms in the Balkans and Beyond; Improving Environmental Quality Through Markets; Competitiveness	Project: Debate on Regulatory Reforms in Serbia
3	Center for Liberal Strategies Anna Ganeva anna@cls-sofia.org tel.: +359 /2/ 981 8926, 986 1433 www.cls-sofia.org	Mission Statement: CLS is a new generation think tank, born out of the political changes in Eastern Europe. We try to make a difference both on the field of research and on the field of policy. Our major advantage is our strategic imagination.	Project: Bulgarian-Yugoslav Task Force D. Kiuranov (July 2001 - September 2003)
4	European Institute Darina Kadounkova dkadounkova@europeaninstitute.net tel.: +359 /2/ 988 6405	The mission of the European Institute is to support the efforts of governmental and non-governmental agencies to successfully prepare Bulgaria for EU membership through research , technical assistance , raising public awareness and training. Areas: EU enlargement and accession Strengthen the capacity of stakeholders in the accession process contribute to stimulating public debate about EU enlargement and informing stakeholders about the costs and benefits of accession	Project: Sharing the specific experience of Bulgaria as a country in SEE, bordering Serbia, on European integration (both association and accession processes) Duration: February – June 2004 Partner: Institute of European Studies, Belgrade Project: Support for promotion of reciprocal understanding between the European Union and Western Balkan countries Duration: January 2004 – December 2006

			Partner: Belgrade centre for European Integration
5	Media Development Center Ognian Zlatev ozlatev@mediacenterbg.org tel.: +359 /2/ 988 9265	Promotes the activities of independent media in Bulgaria and fosters capacity building of the media by encouraging good practice in journalism, ethics, networking and cross-border cooperation. Provides: professional training for journalists and media managers from South Eastern Europe; training courses for operational and language skills; media handbooks and manuals publishing; information service on media and for the media.	Project: South East European Network for Professionalization of the Media (2000 – SEENPM) Partner: Media Centers-Belgrade, Nis, Novi Sad News School, Association of Independent Electronic Media – Belgrade Project: Film on Trans-border crime and ethnic tolerance (October 2003) Partner: Producer House Virus, Belgrade
6	Economic Policy Institute Elitsa Markova epi@epi-bg.org tel.: +359 /2/ 980 10 59	The main fields of activities for the EPI are: Advocacy work: advising Government and Parliament bodies; Analysis of alternative approaches to economic policies; Recommendations of policy changes aimed at encouraging economic growth; Training of politicians, policy-makers, corporate managers and private entrepreneurs; Research projects on economic issues;	Project "Task Force on the Financial Sector Restructuring in South Eastern Europe" (cooperation area - Applied macroeconomic research and event management) Partner: Economics Institute, Serbia
7	Center for the Study of Democracy Denislava Simeonova deni@online.bg tel.: +359 /2/ 971 3000 / 332	Objectives: to provide an enhanced institutional and policy capacity for the EU integration process; to promote institutional reform and the practical implementation of democratic values in legal and economic practice; to monitor public attitudes and serve as a watchdog of the institutional reform process in the country; to strengthen the institutional and management capacity of NGOs in Bulgaria, and reform the legal framework for their operation.	Partner: European Movement in Serbia; Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognosis
8	Institute for Regional and International Studies Marin Lessenski Program Director 15, Frederic Joliot-Curie St., bl. 3, fl.1, apt. 1 Sofia 1113, Bulgaria Tel./fax: + 359 /2/ 971 12 27, 971 12 28, 971 12 29, 971 12 24 E-mail: lessenski@iris-bg.org ; lessenskim@iname.com	Regional and international policy of Bulgaria; Conflict prevention and management; Interethnic and intercommunal problems in Southeastern Europe; Development of security- systems in Southeastern Europe; Regional economic and infrastructure development; Bulgaria's integration into EU and NATO; Regional civic cooperation.	Project "Civil Strategy for Promoting Bilateral Relations between Bulgaria and Serbia" (October 2001 – October 2002) Partner: Forum for Civic Rights. Nis Project: Sharing Bulgarian Experience in European Integration with Serbia (February 2002 – February 2003) – follow-up of previous project

ANNEX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE SURVEY

Survey on Joint Project

Sharing experience between Bulgaria and Serbia in economic policy formulation and development of a strategy for cross-border cooperation in the EU accession process

Conducted by:

Center for Economic Development, Bulgaria



Economics Institute, Serbia



**EKONOMSKI INSTITUT
ECONOMICS INSTITUTE**

Sofia, May-June 2005

About the Project:

The project aims to support non-government sector in both countries in assisting economic policy development and EU integration by transferring experience and skills, and building a capacity for cross-border partnerships among NGOs on both sides, thus accelerating cooperation beyond the third sector, in order to promote economic development, and to involve representatives of the other sectors – the public, and the business - in efficient relations, to enhance awareness of EU processes, while developing public dialogue about accession risks and ways to avoid them. In this way the project will **further develop the capacities for trans-border cooperation between NGOs from Bulgarian and from Serbia**. The project will collect information about the record of joint activities and work so far between NGOs from Serbia and from Bulgaria for the period of the past 5 years (2000 – 2004), and analyze the real state of cooperation and partnership. Stepping on this analysis CED and the Economics Institute (Serbia) will summarize the data, will carry out a needs assessment of what activities, and action will best correspond to Serbia's EU integration context and current situation, and will develop a strategy for its facilitation.

About The Respondent:

Country

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NGO

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Name of respondent

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Position

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Address

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.....

Postal code/City

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Phone/Fax/E-mail:

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Research Areas:

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Requested Data:

Title of Joint Project:

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.....

Duration and dates of Implementation:

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Participating Organizations:

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Donor Organizations:

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Expert Team:

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Project Goals:

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Scope of Work (objectives, tasks, activities):

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Topics of Research:

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Implemented Methodology of Research:

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Achieved Results (and deliverable/s):

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Benefiting Groups by the Project Results:

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Assessment of the cooperative work:

1. Project Assessment

Does the achieved results meet project's goals/concepts? Why?

Which are the most important advantages of such joint projects?

Which are the most important disadvantages of such joint projects?

Which particular steps in the project implementation do you assess as the most significant to the project fulfilment?

Which activities had the greatest impact for the accomplishment of the project goals?

Would you like to work on future joint projects with the same/other NGO? In the same or similar area? Why?

Are there any specific abilities/research areas, created/strengthened by the project fulfilment?

2. Partnership Assessment

Was it easy to work with your partner? Why?

Was there any problem with the communication and coordination of joint work?

What would you like to change in a future partnership with the same (or any other) NGO (something like a general "mistake")?

What is your assessment of the partner NGO potential?

3. Knowledge Transfer Assessment

Were there any shortages of knowledge about the other country and its economic development, when executing the project? How did you manage this situation?

Do you find similarities/differences in the economic and political processes in the two countries?

How can these similarities of differences be used to encourage the development of cooperation and achievement of sustainability in the two countries?

Which key areas for NGO cooperation do you identify for the next 5 years, which can be important for the development of both countries/economies? The Serbian side + the Bulgarian side (please, express your views on both).

Do you have any other joint projects that you would like to give as an example?

4. Donors' Role Assessment

Was the project title well formulated to correspond real economic policy requirements of your country at the moment?

Were the project goals chosen in accordance with the society's agenda in both countries?

Does the rules for participation in donor's programs benefit or hinder joint projects?

What is your impression: is the donor devoted to cross-border cooperation or this project is a result of diversification of approaches? Do they have their own vision on the development of a strategy for cross-border cooperation?

Is EU accession process among donor's priorities? Is donor inclined to support projects assisting policy making on the road to EU accession? Are joint projects welcome?